



The AOS Renaissance Zine

A celebration of the Kelvin-verse Star Trek films



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We Hold Each Other Tonight, Eyes Full of Constellations spidey_kirk on twitter

The soft sound of running water filtered through Spock's ears as he wandered slowly through the garden. The *Enterprise* was stationed around the planet Rjem, a new planet entering the Federation home to red beetle-like insectoids who held peace and beauty to the highest degrees of sanctity. The quiet of the garden and the luscious blossoms that released pleasant perfume into the air put him at ease as he wandered past flower bushes and grand marble fountains. He admitted to himself that the garden was a rather lovely display, the atmosphere seeming to lay thick over everything like a comforting blanket.

After the successful integration of the Rjemen people into the Federation, they had graciously offered food and entertainment to the shore leave deprived crew. Spock had heard the Captain and Doctor McCoy both complain about the lack of vacation over a shared meal several times the past three point seven months. Spock agreed that the *Enterprise* crew's productivity levels had been steadily declining, something shore leave would likely remedy.

Spock returned his mind back to the search for his Captain. The feast had spilled out from the dining room into a large ballroom and royal gardens, the gently glowing lights and distant sounds of the party to his back as he ventured further. It was illogical, Spock couldn't help but admire the scenery awash in moonlight all around him. It was obvious why Jim had stepped out here for a moment to himself. As he walked, the heels of his boots clicked softly along the stone path.

Turning a corner, Spock spotted his Captain lounging on a bench, fruity cocktail in hand and head tilted back to admire the night sky. It was not uncommon for Spock to come across his captain in such a pose, on the *Enterprise* and planetside. When eyes turned away from him, Jim Kirk turned his eyes towards the stars. Spock could understand their aesthetic appeal to humans and other species across the galaxy, could understand how they birthed centuries of poetry, literature, and music about them as he continued to stare.

Captain Kirk became aware of his company, eyes glittering in recognition and face splitting into a grin, Spock could understand perfectly how one could become entranced by the stars.

“Spock.” Jim called in greeting, patting the spot beside him. Unable to refuse, Spock found himself seated besides his Captain and friend, body shifting forwards as Jim’s natural gravity caught Spock in its hold. The soft smile adorning Jim’s face was somehow more intriguing in the low light and the sight of it caused Spock’s heart rate to increase by five point two percent. Jim took a slow swig of the blue drink in his possession, the Rjemen people’s alcohol had little to no effect on humans in moderate doses, something he had overheard Mister Scott bemoan loudly to anyone in earshot.

“Captain.” Spock replied, head dipping lower as his tone became more intimate. “Doctor McCoy instructed me to find you, stating there was a high probability you’d attract trouble if left to your own devices.” Jim snorted, eyes darting to Spock once before returning to the heavens. They both knew what the doctor had actually said was far more explicit and impolite than Spock indicated.

“I’m sure he did.” Jim said, matching his volume to Spock’s. Not wanting his staring noticed, Spock looked towards the constellations as well. Exactly forty-one seconds passed in comfortable silence before Jim let out a soft sigh and let his head fall against Spock’s shoulder, one hand coming to rest on the top of his knee. The warmth and pressure sent a shiver through Spock, his whole being hyper aware of their contact.

“Jim.” He hoped he didn’t sound too breathless.

“Is this okay?” Spock could feel hair from the crown of Jim’s head tickle the underside of his jaw.

“Yes.”

The increased touch between Spock and his Captain made feelings he believed he’d wrestled into submission return with a vengeance. It was an incredible sign of trust from his friend Spock would not take advantage of, every brush of a hand or lingering palm against his back were nothing more than Jim’s increased comfort around Spock. From day one of captaincy, Spock had observed Jim Kirk to be an extremely

friendly and tactile man. Yet, he’d always respected Spock’s personal space before.

After their evening together on Rjem, a new aspect of their friendship had been opened. One Spock treasured even as he internally cursed it. Their normal chess sessions had been moved from the public recreation rooms to the Captain’s private quarters. He couldn’t tear his eyes away from blond eyelashes kissing the top of pink cheeks, or the hand cradling Spock’s captured bishop.

“Checkmate.” Spock said, relieved his diverted attention had not affected his performance or raised suspicion.

“Damn.” Jim muttered. “I almost had you cornered.” Spock raised an eyebrow.

“That is highly unlikely.” Spock said with a raised brow. “Unlike Humans, Vulcans possess a higher affinity for chess as it relies solely on strategy and logic.” Jim laughed, which had been Spock’s goal. His startling blue eyes were warm and open, and he seemed entirely relaxed in his seat. The way Jim held himself in the Captain’s chair was largely a facade of confidence and ease, the sharp line of his shoulders and uncurved spine telling a different story than his teasing remarks and casually crossed legs. He took a few measured breaths to keep a warm blush from spreading across his face. Spock was entirely too pleased at these developments between them.

He was cleaning up the chess set with swift and sure movements as Jim replicated some drinks.

“Stay for a while?” He offered, holding out a steaming cup of Vulcan tea. Spock hesitated, wanting to refuse and escape temptation, but ultimately deciding he would rather be here than anywhere else.

“I currently have no other obligations I must tend to.” Spock accepted, the cup was a pleasant temperature in his hands.

“Wait here, I’ll be right back.” He said before disappearing into the bathroom. Spock took a seat on the comfortable loveseat along the far wall, sipping delicately at his tea. When Jim returned, Spock swallowed it thickly. He had changed into comfortable looking pajama pants and a sleep shirt, was barefoot and smiling sheepishly.

“I usually change out of my uniform by now to relax and it was driving me crazy.” He admitted.

“As we are off shift and in private, you may dress as you please.” Spock said, tightening his grip on the mug.

“Awesome.” Jim jumped onto the empty space left on the loveseat and curled his feet lightly against Spock’s thigh. The pressure was innocuous, yet Spock could focus on nothing else.

He didn’t hear a word Jim was saying as he flipped on a holovid they were obviously supposed to be watching together. Spock was intensely ashamed of his lack of control and took a drink of his now cold tea.

After the holo was over and they had parted ways, Spock returned to his own quarters and meditated for four hours straight, not bothering to change out of his uniform or even remove his boots. When he crawled into bed much later than usual, his extended meditation did little to help the restlessness that plagued him hours into the night.

It seemed Spock’s inner turmoil would only get worse as time went on.

“Spock!” Jim called from down the hall, jogging to catch up with him. Spock slowed his pace to allow it, eyeing Jim’s casual attire. Tight jeans, white t-shirt, and a black leather jacket. He carefully trained his eyes onto Jim’s face. “There you are. I wanted to ask you if you were free for a little stroll planetside with me. We’re only stationed here for another day and I know you haven’t clocked in any leave hours yet.” Blinking slowly, Spock considered his next steps.

He could accompany Jim, his friend, down for an enjoyable time sight seeing and partaking in local cuisine. All the while enduring the touch of fingers against the back of his hand, a warm hand resting on his forearm, or the press of a leg against his own under the dinner table. The alternative was using his offtime to meditate and finish the rest of the day’s paperwork alone.

“I am amenable to your suggestion,” Spock wondered if there had really been a choice in the first place. “But I must finish my current task first.”

“Great! Just shoot me a message when you’re done and I’ll meet you at your quarters.” Without letting Spock say another word, Jim quickly scampered off.

The lab work Spock was wrapping up didn’t take him long and he concluded the report with the neat print of his signature. Spock exited the lab with a curt nod to an ensign still working at their station and glanced down at the PADD in hand. He could send a yeoman to deliver it, but concluded it would be more logical for him to do it himself as his quarters were located only a few floors above med bay.

“Mister Spock,” Doctor McCoy drawled as the med bay doors slid shut behind Spock. “What can I do for you?”

“Doctor.” Spock returned the greeting. “I have the report you wanted from the previous mission’s botanical analysis.” The doctor’s eyes lit up.

“Took you long enough, I’ve been waiting nearly two weeks for this!” He quickly snatched the PADD from Spock and began skimming it. Spock gave him an unimpressed look.

“You should know, Doctor, that all undocumented alien specimens collected by away teams must be thoroughly examined prior to use, as is Starfleet regulation.” He primly folded his hands behind his back.

McCoy scowled. “Well, I don’t have to like it. Why are you even handing this over in person, anyways? You never step foot in med bay unless I tie your ass to a stretcher and drag you.” Resisting the urge to look down his nose, Spock simply thinned his lips in distaste at the southern doctor’s illogical hyperbole.

“It was logical to bring you the report, as I was already heading this way. The Captain and I are beaming down for shore leave once my shift has ended.”

“Jesus, Spock, I don’t need to hear about your guys’ date.” McCoy looked faintly queasy. “You two keep all your lovebird shit to yourselves.” Unaware of the state of shock he’d left Spock in, McCoy returned to his office to go over the report.

It took one point thirty-one seconds for Spock to compose himself and exit the med bay.

In his quarters, Spock mechanically went about removing his uniform and donning more casual Vulcan robes, the doctor's confusing words still lingering on his mind. Spock was often confused by the phrases and jokes Humans regularly employed in conversation, especially those from McCoy. He decided it was best to file the interaction as unimportant and cast it out of his thoughts.

Before exiting his room, Spock sent Jim a brief message confirming he was ready for their outing. As he waited, Spock felt vaguely self-conscious he would look too formal next to Jim's attire. He mentally considered a few alternatives in his closet when Jim arrived with a smile and a wave. He paused, eyes running up and down Spock's form, leaving trails of heat in their wake like his gaze was a physical touch. Any worries over how he looked dissipated completely, Spock's mouth feeling strangely dry.

The *Enterprise* was stationed at a Starfleet station for a quick resupply, something Spock knew Mister Scott had been looking forward to. He could perfectly recall the amused and slightly fearful look in Jim's eyes after being accosted by Scotty to excitedly ramble about increasing warp engine efficiency. The little Spock had overheard involved taking apart the engines and putting them back together slightly to the left once the *Enterprise* was docked.

They strolled down the road, bustling bodies returning from work and regular weekend traffic crowded the sidewalks, forcing Jim and Spock to walk close together to avoid separation.

"The restaurant's this way." Jim said, pointing with one hand and gently touching Spock's elbow with the other, steering them towards their destination. Spock was glad Jim was too focused on weaving through the crowd to notice the soft flush permeating along his cheeks.

"Hey, watch where you're going!" Jim snapped when someone knocked shoulders with Spock, making the Vulcan stumble backwards. An arm shot out to wrap around his shoulders, steadying him, as Jim shot a dirty look at the quickly retreating resident's back. "You okay?" Jim was so close, Spock felt his breath brush against his face. He could smell the toothpaste Jim had brushed his teeth with before they left.

"I am perfectly adequate, Jim." Spock said, straightening up and gently stepping out from under Jim's arm. His control was shaky at best surrounded in packed groups, let alone with Jim's warm body pressed along his side, so close yet out of reach.

There was an awkward moment where Jim didn't move, arm still hanging in the air between them as people sidestepped them impatiently, then he smiled and lowered his arm.

"Okay, good. Let's keep going." Guilt flooded Spock's chest.

He was worried he'd already ruined the evening, but Jim quickly recovered and launched into one of his many stories of him and Doctor McCoy during their time together at the Starfleet Academy. Any tension Spock had caused quickly dissipated as they engaged in their normal repertoire. The flow of conversation naturally trailed off when they'd been seated and their server arrived.

After ordering his drink, Jim leaned back in his chair and crossed one leg over the other, foot casually trailing up Spock's calf. The corner of the restaurant they were in had a rather intimate ambiance and Spock noticed it was not unlike some places he and Uhura would dine when they had been a couple. He tried not to dwell on how this made him feel in fear of his self control deteriorating further. It was shameful how close he'd been to breaking down and reaching out for Jim, to grabbing hold of his hand and refusing to let go. His leg itched with the need to press into Jim's touch under the table.

Thankfully, Spock was able to survive the rest of their meal without embarrassing himself. They stepped outside into the cool air, Spock taking a deep breath to stabilize his internal temperature. He was Vulcan, he was in control of his emotions.

Their walk back to the *Enterprise*'s beam out spot was long and meandering, taking the 'scenic' route as Jim had put it. Spock did not mind. The streets were deserted and Spock was much more at ease without the dozens of people pressing in on all sides. They passed by a park and the air filled with the pleasant scent of cut grass. For some reason, the sensory input reminded him of that night on Rjem with Jim's head resting on Spock's shoulder as they stargazed together. Spock internally braced against the wave of longing

that accompanied the memory.

Without warning, Jim veered towards the path leading into the park, grabbing a hold of Spock's arm to drag him with. He briefly stumbled before regaining his balance and matching Jim's pace.

"It's a beautiful night, let's keep walking for a little bit longer." Jim looked particularly stunning then, face bright and slightly hopeful, gently pulling Spock with him like Spock would ever pull away. He felt like he couldn't breathe.

"As you wish, Jim." It must have been a trick of the light that made it look like Jim was blushing.

They strolled through the park, Jim's arm linked with Spock's, in a comfortable silence. Spock had never known someone he felt like he could simply exist with, the way he did with Jim. Someone who didn't make him feel too Vulcan or not Vulcan enough, who accepted all of Spock as he was.

They passed under a tree with low hanging branches at the same time Jim had turned his head to say something to Spock. Unaware of its approach, a limb smacked solidly against the side of Jim's head and lodged a leaf in his hair. Jim stumbled back, looking dazed.

"Jim, are you alright?" Spock exclaimed.

"Yeah, I'm good." Jim replied with an embarrassed laugh. "Guess I wasn't looking where I was going."

"Indeed." Spock said dryly. Without thinking, he reached out and plucked the leaf from Jim's hair, discarding it with a flick of his wrist. He heard Jim suck in a breath and Spock froze. Their eyes locked and he was extremely aware of their close proximity with each other. Neither moved, simply staring at the other.

"Spock, I..." Jim trailed off. He seemed frustrated for a minute before steeling himself and leaning in, pressing his lips chastely against Spock's. It was such a surprise, Spock startled and immediately pulled away.

"Oh my god, I'm so sorry Spock. I knew it was too soon, I just..." Jim stared helplessly at his silent first officer. "I should have asked first. I know you want to take it slow and I respect that." He drew himself up, a determined look in his eye. "It won't happen again."

Spock heard none of what Jim said. He was too busy remembering lips that tasted faintly of the wine they'd drank at dinner. His entire being demanding more.

"Spock?" Jim sounded nervous.

"It seems there has been a misunderstanding." As his brain furiously worked to catch up, Spock began seeing pieces of the puzzle fall into place. Events were thrown into stark light that Spock could easily reexamine with the new information he'd received, and he felt increasingly more foolish as he did so. Spock finally turned back to Jim, saw the fear and concern in his eyes, and his heart clenched. "I believe we are not, to use a Human colloquialism, 'on the same page.'"

"I... we aren't?" Jim frowned, drawing his arms close around his body in a defensive maneuver.

"Jim, are we currently engaged in a romantic liaison?" While Spock was sure he had not misread the signs a second time, he felt it was still necessary to ask. Jim's eyes widened.

"Yeah, I-I thought..." Uncertainty grew until it took over Jim's expression and caused him to curl further into himself. "I thought we were." He mumbled, resigned.

In all the time Spock had known Jim, as his Captain and his friend, he had never seen him look so defeated. Had never seen him look as if he was giving up. It was unsettling to watch the strongest man Spock had ever known wilt right before his eyes.

Spock stepped forwards into Jim's personal space, slowly and deliberately as if to not startle him. He raised his arms to grip Jim's biceps firmly, making him look up into Spock's searching gaze.

"Jim..." His voice lowered. "For the past two point three months, I have been working under the false pretense that you wanted nothing more than friendship. I assure you, the truth is precisely the opposite. I apologize for my mistake and the miscommunication it caused. And I apologize for not giving you everything I am." Jim's tear-filled eyes glittered with starlight, growing brighter as he understood Spock's words.

Hands reached, suddenly desperate, searching for somewhere to anchor themselves onto Spock's person. Trembling and hesitant, Jim

held Spock tightly by the collar and glanced down at his mouth.

“God, I was so scared you weren’t ready. That I pushed you too far.” He shook his head, a grin rising to his lips like the sun rising after a rainy day. “I thought you were just taking things slow, I can’t believe we wasted all that time...”

“We still have time. We still have today.” Spock promised.

“And tomorrow?” Jim asked helplessly as they drifted closer.

“And tomorrow.” Spock agreed and kissed Jim underneath the stars.



Whiteout

bradleymartin on ao3, bradley-martin on tumblr

[2255]

“What do you want for Christmas?” Leonard asks.

He assumes that Jim will give him one of his quick, easy answers, but Jim just stops dead on the sidewalk. Leonard stops, too, watching Jim lean his head back to scowl up at the sky like it’s done something to offend him personally.

“Snow,” Jim says.

Leonard does a double-take up into that perfect blue that even he couldn’t have found a fault with a minute ago. But the way Jim says *snow* puts something into Leonard’s head. By the time he looks back at Jim, Leonard can *picture* it: Jim in his cadet red coat, hat over that golden hair, white snow swirling around him. Leonard’s hardly ever seen snow before, but he knows it’d be fucking blinding. Something catches deep in Leonard then, like an echo but all new.

Finally, a little too gruffly, Leonard says, “We’re in San Francisco.”

“No, really?” Jim tone is mock-surprise as he turns back to him with wide eyes.

“Just sayin’, Jim.” He chuckles and squeezes his shoulder.

“Don’t get your hopes up.”

Jim breaks into a grin. “Well, it’s *already* Christmas — a little late. Though I have complete faith you’d be able to control the weather.”

“You didn’t seem too sad about that bottle of whiskey.”

“That was for yourself as much as me.”

Leonard lets out a loud laugh, unable to deny it.

“Maybe you should’ve gone home for Christmas, Bones,” Jim says, eyes back on the sky again, that all-too-familiar look in his eyes — like he’s seeing something Leonard would never be able to. “Pulling a double shift on Christmas Eve? Must’ve been fucking miserable.”

“You been talking to my mom or somethin’? They’re fine without me. Besides, I don’t have to work tomorrow, so we can get *drunk*.”

He’d never admit it to Jim, but the fact is that he didn’t *want* to leave. He could’ve gotten the time off, but he didn’t even try. No matter what he says, he likes the Academy; he made the decision to come here when he was backed into a corner and snarling, but now he can’t imagine being anywhere else.

When he got here, he’d thought that he would feel like an old man surrounded by a bunch of kids. But he feels younger, somehow — and maybe for the first time. He spent his teenage years rocketing through college courses and then going to med school at nineteen. That was his whole world, until he got married too young. And divorced too young.

Oh, yeah, this is what it’s like to live and enjoy it, Leonard had thought, that first week on campus. Then later, after months of late-night conversations and true friendship: *This is what it’s like to live and not feel alone. Not feel like every weakness and flaw might become an atomic bomb*.

Leonard wonders if he’s made Jim’s life any better.

He hopes he has. Because some days, especially those rough early days, it was enough to just be the kind of person Jim Kirk wanted to be friends with. No matter how annoying and persistent he was, no matter if he always seemed to show up at the most inopportune times. Leonard at least liked himself a sliver when he was around Jim.

It got him through.

“What do *you* want for Christmas?” Jim asks, grabbing his arm to pull him forward again. They walk on towards the edge of campus. Even though there’s at least *some* other people staying over break, for once they don’t have to weave through anyone.

Leonard shrugs. *I can’t remember the last time I’ve wanted anything*. That just seems too fucking maudlin to say — especially out here in the bright sunlight, on break, with his best friend. Maybe holed up in his dorm late at night, brain scrambled from studying, the buzz of whiskey throughout him. Things are easier to say in the dark. Just words and warmth and a midnight confessional.

“I just want to eat Pad Thai and drink all night,” Leonard finally says.

Jim laughs. “You’re an easy man to please, huh?”

Leonard’s never been accused of that in his life, so he just snorts. When Jim starts to slip his hand away, Leonard grabs his arm instead. Jim looks at him out of the corner of his eye, just one quick but piercing blue second, and then he grins again.

The first time he grinned at Leonard like that — the megawatt one — it hit him like a virus. And he’s never been the same since. Leonard tightens his grip on Jim’s coat, realizing something for the first time. Something that probably should’ve been obvious from day one — from that goddamn shuttle ride. After all, what’s his life been since then?

Just *Jim*. Bright, golden Jim.

He can’t stop the real answer to Jim’s question from slamming into his mind: *Sometimes I want you*.

But Leonard wouldn’t say that. No amount of whiskey could unlock that in him.

[2257]

Jim’s been quieter since he failed the Kobayashi Maru. Leonard thought he would laugh it off in that typical Jim way, and, sure, he did plenty of laughing. But there’s something new in his eyes, like he’s taken it as a challenge from the universe. Maybe Leonard would try to talk some sense into him, but he knows all too well that Jim can never let anything go — not even a test literally designed to be unbeatable. Besides, if Jim wants to cope by sticking to him like glue — even more than before — Leonard isn’t going to complain.

“Sad you didn’t go to Georgia this year?” Jim asks, glancing up at him blearily from where he’s sprawled out on Leonard’s bed. Jim’s much more drunk than he is, but Leonard’s certainly feeling it, too — hell, they’re nearly all the way through the cheap bottle of whiskey Jim brought over.

“No,” Leonard says, glancing out the dark window, unable to stop himself from feeling that Christmas Eve magic — even if he got stuck working all day tomorrow. He’s curled up at the foot of the bed, his knees to his chest with his chin resting on one. He could say more — he’s plenty loose enough to bitch about traveling or his mom’s

incessant questions or how hard it is to get time off from the clinic.

But that really wouldn’t even come close to the heart of the matter. He just stares at the long lines of Jim, eyes tracing over his arm dangling over the side, his fingers just touching the rim of his whiskey glass. Then, suddenly, Jim turns the force of those blue eyes on him.

“You should be with your family, Bones. You got ‘em.”

Leonard softens, just like he always does. “I wanted to be *here*,” he says, and it feels like a confession. Then, without thinking, he adds, “Y’know, I got you a present in Georgia last year and never gave it to you.”

“*Bones*,” Jim says, sounding much more horrified than the situation warrants. He bolts up in bed, hair mussed. They’ve had plenty of drinking sessions over the years, but Leonard’s attraction to him hits all over again. There’s something special about Jim when he gets drunk and philosophical.

Leonard slides off the bed and practically crawls over to his closet, starting to rifle through all the shit piled at the bottom. His dorm is always fairly clean, but he’s taken an *out of sight, out of mind* approach to this sort of clutter.

“Are you tellin’ me we could’ve been drinking some fancy-ass Kentucky bourbon this whole time?” Jim asks, badly mimicking his accent. “All *year*?”

“It’s not *bourbon* — unfortunately — and since when has one bottle lasted us a year, anyway?”

“A guy can dream, Bones.”

“Well, best keep expectations low,” Leonard says, finally spotting the white-and-silver snowflake wrapping paper his mom had forced him to use on her usual Christmas Eve rampage. The wrap job is even more abysmal after rolling around in the closet for a year, but when Leonard pulls it out, Jim’s eyes lock onto it like it’s the Holy Grail.

Leonard tosses it on the bed, watching it bounce once before Jim lunges for it. Leonard stays silent, suddenly regretting bringing it up, but Jim unwraps the gift with childlike fervor, dismantling the box in the process. In just a couple seconds, he pulls a snow globe out of the wreckage.

“It’s dumb,” Leonard finds himself saying in the silent, ticking seconds as Jim stares at it. “Damn childish, I know, but I just—”

But Jim just breaks into a grin, immediately shaking the snow globe. Leonard watches the world turn white in Jim’s hands.

Being around Jim is relaxing most of the time, exhilarating when Jim wants it to be. Usually Leonard can ignore the feelings growing inside of him, but at times like this, it’s damn near impossible. He’s heard plenty of people compare falling in love to something *blooming*, but this sure as hell feels different. For Jim, his feelings have always been all-consuming.

A whiteout.

“It’s perfect,” Jim says, collapsing onto his back. Without a thought, Leonard gets back into bed with him. Hell, they’ve done it a million times before; Jim would rather stay in Bones’s single room rather than his own double, and Jim’s barely heard of the concept of personal space. But something dormant in Leonard comes alive when Jim pulls him closer with one arm, holding the snow globe up to the dimmed overhead light with his free hand. “I miss snow,” Jim adds softly.

I think I might fall in love with you someday, Leonard thinks, watching Jim shake the snow globe again. The light shines through the glittering snowflakes, creating shadows that dance over both of them. For just a second, Leonard can see it, too — the two of them in the snow, in Iowa or wherever Jim wants it. Leonard would be so cold that he would pull Jim closer to him for warmth, just like this.

Leonard knows that someday they’re going to be different people with different lives. They’re going to be light years apart. Literally. Maybe Jim will send a holo sometimes — and that’ll be it. *Captain Kirk? Yeah, we were friends at the Academy*, Leonard will say, and maybe by then he’ll keep some stories of Jim’s exploits in his back pocket. The kind of stories people like to hear, not the moments like this one — the kind that really matter.

And fuck — *fuck* — Leonard is already dreading it.

[2258]

“Just trust me,” Leonard says, shoving Jim onto the transporter pad.

“Why do I feel like we’ve switched souls or something?” Jim asks, throwing one startled look at Kyle, the transporter chief, who just chuckles and shakes his head.

Leonard sighs and goes onto his own spot on the pad. “I go along with all your schemes, don’t I?”

“Not without complaint.”

Leonard gives him a withering stare, earning a wide grin in response. Before Leonard can say it, Jim does: “Energize.”

Jim’s been captain of the Enterprise for a few months now, but they’ve only been going out in two- or three-week excursions. Enough for Jim to complain every time they come back. He spends all his free time mapping out the possibilities of a longer mission first to Leonard, then to the rest of the bridge crew, and finally to any admiral that’ll talk to him. Leonard’s sure that sooner or later he’ll get his way — and, knowing Jim, it’ll be on the sooner end of things.

But now Leonard has a scheme of his own. Despite every lounge space of the Enterprise being decked out in holiday decorations, it isn’t quite enough. As Leonard listened to Spock ramble on about the climate map of the planet, Leonard had gotten an idea. The planet doesn’t have a huge population, and all lifeforms are safely hundreds of miles away.

Leonard and Jim reemerge at the coordinates Leonard chose. After the usual shudder runs through Leonard’s body, he turns to Jim, who’s looking around open-mouthed. Leonard blinks and does the same.

Snow.

“Fuck,” Jim says, sounding dazed, staring around at the icy, white world, just a few evergreen trees dotting the landscape. It’s mostly just a vast expanse of snow — wouldn’t have been Leonard’s first choice, but Jim looks the furthest thing from disappointed.

Leonard shivers violently, cold ripping through his Starfleet-issued coat and setting into his bones in record time. He immediately regrets this decision. Just *slightly*, though; surprising Jim Kirk is always worth it, not to mention that look of *wonder* on his face. It's been too long since he's seen Jim look like a happy kid again, and it has Leonard grinning in spite of himself. He says softly, "Merry Christmas."

Jim turns to him, eyes still wide. "*Bones*."

"I just, uh, wanted you to have snow."

Remember? Leonard wishes he could add, and his chest is tight from all this goddamn shit he keeps locked inside now. *Do you remember like I remember? Are all these memories burned into your mind like mine?*

"This is *amazing*," Jim breathes, then lurches forward and wraps his arms around Leonard. Leonard leans into him, enjoying his warmth just as much as having an excuse to be this close to him.

He's not entirely sure when falling in love went from being a *someday* possibility to a *right fucking now* reality. Maybe it was all those months ago, at that exact second he realized he couldn't even set foot onto the Enterprise without Jim being there. But it feels older than that, too. Like the dawn of time.

"A lot's changed in the last year, Jim," Leonard finds himself saying directly into Jim's coat. "A hell of a lot more than I could've guessed. I know you've been stressed out — even though you don't show it much."

"You're right." Jim grabs hold of his shoulders and pushes him gently until they're looking at each other again. "And it's not just that, Bones — not just being Captain." Leonard tilts his head, and Jim continues, "Every time we go back to earth, I think it's going to be the last time I see you on the Enterprise. It feels like you're going to take one of those million job offers you keep getting — hole up in a hospital with real gravity and leave me behind."

Leonard might think he's joking, if it weren't for the earnest look in his eyes. Sure, Leonard's got no end of festering feelings for Jim, but it's hard to imagine Jim worrying when they're apart, too. Leonard says gruffly, "*You'd be the one leaving me behind.*"

Jim shakes his head slowly, saying simply, "No."

Leonard reaches out and brushes the back of his fingers against Jim's face. It's an insane urge, but he can't help it. Sure, he's touched him a million times before, but never like this — like a work of art. Leonard's never been one for art, but, hell, maybe he would if everything looked like Jim.

"Bones?" Jim says, hand going up to hold Leonard's wrist softly.

"I — uh—" he breaks off, dropping his hand. He's no stranger to bad choices, and being around Jim has always been too goddamn easy for either of their own good. Hell, he might as well be a numbing agent — sometimes Leonard forgets his own feelings are so strong that they're eating him up inside.

He looks at Jim again — really *looks* this time. This world is so picturesque that they might as well be trapped in that snow globe permanently on display in Jim's quarters. Even if time stopped, Leonard would go along with it. He could hide forever in Jim's friendship, Jim's kindness, Jim's starship, the fog from Jim's breath, the warmth of his body, the easy circle of his arms.

But they aren't in a goddamn snow globe — not *really* anyway — and someday Leonard is bound to go crazy from doing nothing. Maybe he could brush all this off, but it's impossible to think of anything to say when all that's pounding through his consciousness is: *I love you*. He's said it before, to other people, and for a hell of a lot less than this.

But what he finds himself saying is: "Kiss me."

He tenses when Jim's eyes go wide, but instead of pushing Leonard away, Jim reaches out for his upper arms again. Their eyes lock, Jim's searching and unsure. Leonard knows he could make a joke or play it off, but he *can't*. Maybe Jim's had a thousand people say *kiss me*, but Leonard's sure as hell never said it before — at least, not like *that* — so he leaves all his sincerity whirling around them with the snow.

Something seems to click into place in Jim's expression, and then he pulls Leonard's body into his. When Jim kisses him, Leonard's

thoughts finally screech to a halt. He feels lightheaded immediately like this might fever dream, and he forgets the cold and the alien planet. He just clutches Jim to him and lets himself get lost in the way Jim's god-damn tongue against his makes warmth bloom all throughout him.

Jim pulls back, holding onto Leonard's face with both hands. "What's happening?" Jim says softly, for once sounding genuinely confused.

"I love you," Leonard says, and it's easier with the intoxication from kissing Jim still making his thoughts a haze. He almost forgets to be embarrassed. "I got the idea a couple weeks ago. I came into your ready room, and you were looking out at the stars while we were at warp speed. Something about it looked like snow."

Jim smiles at him, giving him the same look he gave the snow, and Leonard doesn't push him to say anything back. After all, he recognizes that soft expression, the way his hands are tracing Leonard's face, the intensity of that kiss. Leonard might've had a hell of a head start, but he'd wager quite a lot that Jim's rapidly catching up.

"Y'know, I saw us in that snow globe last year," Jim admits softly. "Just us, together. It was the first time I'd really thought like that — of *us*."

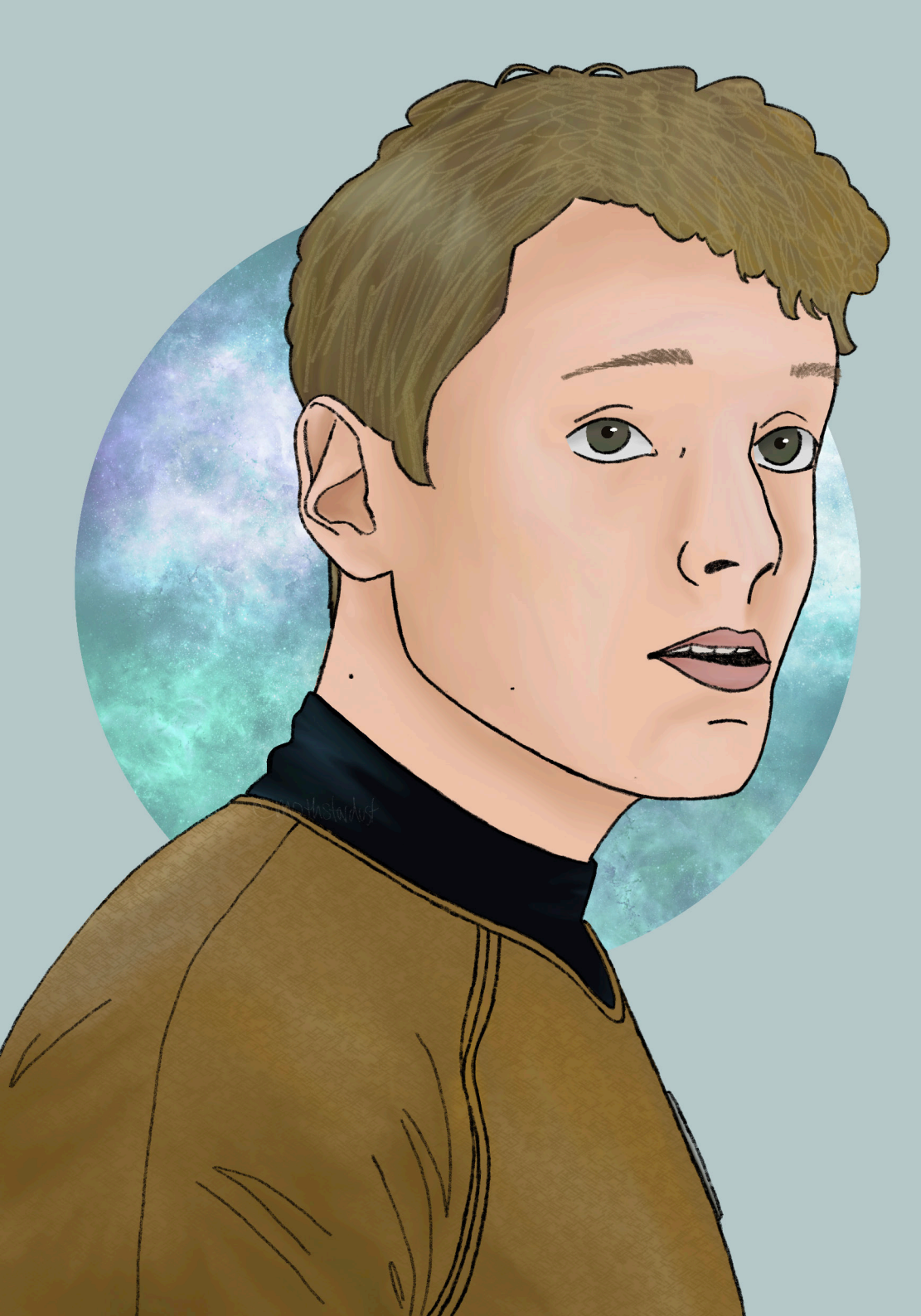
There's something in his blue eyes that's never been there before, and it's too much for Leonard to bear. He leans forward and buries his face in Jim's shoulder again, unable to say anything at all. Instead, he just slides his arms around Jim, under his coat. Warmth floods him again. Jim chuckles in his ear as he wraps himself around Leonard.

Jim's voice is in his ear as he asks softly, "Snow's not so bad, huh?"

"Enjoy it while it lasts."

Jim laughs and tightens his grip on Leonard. "Merry Christmas to you, too, Bones."





The Way Their Fingers Touch

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Leonard is wide awake, exhausted but unable to fall asleep, when the realization that he's caught feelings for Spock comes crashing down on him.

It's embarrassing, really—more embarrassing than back at the Academy when he had it bad for Jim, more embarrassing than everything that went down with Jocelyn. But he was younger then. He's over Jocelyn and Jim now. Mostly.

It's easier, knowing that Jim isn't the type to ever settle down. Jim likes having the freedom to do as he pleases, and Leonard is able to suppress most of those pesky feelings that arise by reminding himself that Jim would never stoop so low as to abandon his independence and tie himself down to someone else.

And when Leonard *has* found himself sick with it, eyes glued to Jim as he struts around the bridge like a peacock, he's found the cure in white knuckling it until he can pour himself a stiff drink back in the solitude of his own quarters.

But this? *Spock*? It's ridiculous—as of six months ago, Leonard still wasn't entirely convinced whether or not he even *liked* the guy, but then Spock nearly bled out during their little heart-to-heart on Altamid, and...

Well. It seems Leonard's gotten soft.

He gives himself forty-eight hours to get his shit together and face this thing head-on, which is how he ends up outside of Spock's quarters after an especially long shift.

The doors open but Spock doesn't invite Leonard inside. He just stands there and stares at Leonard expectantly, and that alone has Leonard almost rethinking the entire thing.

Leonard clears his throat, wringing his hands together as he just barely manages to get out, "I, uh, was just wondering if you'd like to get dinner with me. Tonight, maybe."

Spock doesn't react, doesn't even blink. "We have eaten together on numerous occasions, Doctor." Spock pauses, his lips pursing in thought. "I do not understand why you have approached this request with such formality. Is it not normal for us to take our meals together?"

Leonard clenches his eyes shut. He takes a moment to search for patience, then exhales heavily as he opens his eyes again. "I'm asking you out, Spock."

"Asking me out?"

Leonard's face feels hot. "Yeah. I realized after all that crap on Altamid and Yorktown, with our lives on the line... Well, I care about you, Spock." Spock opens his mouth to interrupt, but Leonard raises his hands up to stop him. "I know, I'm surprised by it, too. But I do. And—and I'd like to have dinner with you, if you'll have me."

"Ah. I see."

Leonard doesn't know what to make of that response and he waits, fidgeting. He's starting to sweat and his shirt clings to his sides unpleasantly.

"I must apologize, Leonard," Spock finally says, and it's almost funny how just those little words can fill a man with a sense of dread like no other. "Jim asked me to dinner with him three weeks ago. We are..."

Spock trails off, lips parted as he searches for the right word.

"In a relationship?" Leonard reluctantly suggests, and Spock nods.

Shit.

The worst part is that Spock looks truly sorry about it, too.

Leonard makes a half-assed attempt to congratulate them both before he turns on his heel and hightails it back to his quarters. Safely inside, he frees his bottle of bourbon and a glass from behind his desk before he flops himself down on his bed and pours himself a drink, wondering just what has him feeling so bothered about Spock dating Jim.

It's not like he'd really gotten his hopes up. This sort of thing had only

two answers, and he knew he had just as good a shot at getting a no as he had getting a yes.

So why exactly is this getting under his skin?

He knocks back his glass and pours himself another one, sipping as he contemplates.

It only takes a second for him to realize that his problem isn't just with Spock. It's that he hasn't actually moved on from Jim at all.

Leonard lays back and glares up at the ceiling, as if it's to blame for his troubles.

He finishes off his glass. He considers sitting up to pour another but figures if he moves from his current position, he'll be sick.

So instead, he clutches the glass to his chest, swallowing back waves of emotion and nausea, finding that the liquor has done little to chase away any of the thoughts that have been plaguing him.

Now that Leonard knows, it's obvious that Jim and Spock are together.

It's not like they're making out on the bridge or reciting love poetry to each other on away missions. No, it's the little things, like Spock and Jim leaving dinner early together to be on their own or the way their fingers touch as they walk ahead of Leonard on the way back to the bridge. It's Jim's smile as Spock gives a report on a recent experiment or how Spock will watch Jim out of the side of his eye when Jim speaks with Uhura and Sulu. It's the way they can never seem to completely draw their attention away from each other, no matter where they are or what they should be doing.

Leonard realizes after a few days of studying their behavior—most of which he spends processing just how screwed he is that he can't draw his attention away from either of them—that he's distracted. Christine has had to nudge him out of his thoughts twice now in sick bay, and *that* is just unacceptable. He's the ship's doctor; he should be attentive.

So, he throws himself into his work. He's not sure it's a healthy coping mechanism, but he thinks it hurts less, and even better, it distances himself from Spock and Jim, which he's sure the couple will

appreciate. It keeps him from third-wheeling and getting in the way of what they'd clearly rather be doing.

He starts working late nights and he manages to keep from intruding on them fairly successfully for about five days. Then, Jim comes stumbling in, eyeing Leonard down with big, worried eyes.

"Bones, is something wrong?" Jim asks, pressing. "Have I upset you or something? Did *Spock* do something?"

Jim sounds genuinely alarmed. It makes Leonard feel sick.

Leonard's not an idiot. He knows when he needs to soothe someone's fears, even if he has to lie in order to do so. He tells Jim no, that everything's okay.

Which is how he ends up spending his evenings interrupting their dates, *again*, because Jim won't let him leave them alone. Jim makes him join them for game nights and dinners and playful bickering and debating and arguing, and Leonard just wishes that Jim would let him go back to hiding himself away in his office.

There's no way to explain himself to Jim—he's sure from Jim's perspective that it just seems like he was keeping his distance to not get in their way, which isn't entirely wrong—but the truth of it, that he's falling deeper and deeper in love with them both, is something he doesn't think he'll ever admit to.

But there's no way Jim will let him avoid them forever, so he's stuck acting like everything is normal. Leonard is a doctor, not an actor; he's not particularly good at pretending.

"Y'know," he says over a game of cards one night, watching as Jim's foot nudges Spock's ankle under the table, "if you lovebirds are going to keep making eyes at each other, I'm gonna leave."

It's an attempt at lightheartedness, but he regrets drawing attention to them being a couple almost immediately. Sure, Jim laughs, and Spock seems amused, but as Jim's hand moves to rest on Spock's forearm, Leonard is only reminded that he's the outsider here.

Leonard quits trying to crack jokes after that in the days that follow, and if Jim notices that something is off, he stays quiet about it.

Things carry on unbearably tense. Surely Jim knows that Leonard tried to ask out Spock but hasn't brought it up, and Leonard isn't

about to either, not when things are already bad enough.

Weeks pass, and Leonard stops feeling so sore about it. Jim brightens up and stops eyeing him so suspiciously, and even Spock stops studying him like he was prone to do in the days directly after Leonard asked him out.

Leonard thinks, with a little more time, that things will all be normal again.

Soaking wet and dripping water onto the transporter pad, Leonard does his best to ignore Keenser and Scotty's startled stares.

Jim slaps Leonard on the back as he hops off the raised platform. "Bones is basically a hero," he says in far too good a mood. "He saved a man from drowning!"

Leonard grimaces. "You make it sound more dramatic than it was. All I did was dive off the side of the boat and pull him back on board. It was nothing."

Jim snorts. "*It was nothing.*" Yeah, sure, Bones." He turns to look at Scotty and adds, "Hell of an understatement. It was Bones' quick thinking that got them to agree to join the Federation. They liked that he was willing to risk his life for one of their own."

Leonard starts heading towards the door. He's damp and itchy from the salt water drying on his skin, and he's tired of listening to Jim blabber on and on about Leonard being a hero. Sure, now the Pgrellians are all friendly with the Federation, but Leonard is sure that that would have happened even if he hadn't pulled the poor sap from the water.

He's not surprised when Jim follows him out of the transporter room, and he's even less surprised when Spock meets them in the hall outside. Still, Leonard sighs. "Kinda tired of the attention, guys. First the Pgrellians, now y'all, too?"

"Aw, c'mon Bones, is it really that bad? They seem to really love you."

"Wasn't my intention."

"Is a little attention that terrible? Good attention, I mean," Jim adds quickly. "I mean, why not embrace it? Letting people love you isn't a bad thing."

Something in Leonard's chest twinges. He'd rather not have a conversation about love with Jim and Spock, especially not now, when he's too worn out after a long day of diplomacy. He doesn't get how the kid can do it: Jim seems so full of energy even after having an equally busy day with the Pgrellians.

Despite this, Leonard snorts. "Pretty sure between the three of us, you're Mister Popular. *You're* the one everybody loves."

They reach the mess hall. Leonard isn't hungry, but he'll at least wait until they finish their conversation before he flees to his quarters to shuck off these clothes. As they near the replicators, Jim snorts. "Right, because I've never pissed *anybody* off. The Starfleet admiralty? They *totally* love me."

"While you are being sarcastic, it is not an entirely inaccurate statement," Spock chimes in, drawing the baffled gazes of both Leonard and Jim. Spock continues, "Though the admiralty has a... distaste for your tendencies to break the rules, if we consider your romantic and sexual history, there is evidence to support that a considerable proportion of people love or have loved you."

Jim laughs, and there's an undeniable pink tint to his cheeks. He runs a hand through his hair, flustered, and turns his attention to the replicator. "Pretty certain your logic is flawed, but sure, everyone loves me."

Suddenly, Jim's expression brightens, and he flashes a grin Leonard's way. "But hey, you'd know all about that, right Bones?"

Leonard has barely been paying attention—his pants are sticking to him in the most distracting way—but something about Jim's tone stills him. "Know what?"

"If I remember correctly, Spock," Jim says, and now Leonard *knows* that Jim is teasing him, "even Bones had a thing for me back in the day, when we were at the Academy. I swear it's true, he admitted it to me when we were drunk and—"

Leonard's blood runs cold. He doesn't hear the end of that sentence, but he feels Spock's eyes on him as Jim throws his head back and laughs. He can't look Spock in the eye and keeps his eyes anywhere but Spock's face, but then Jim catches his gaze, and he watches in real time

as the glee in Jim's eyes disappears and it's abundantly clear that Jim's realized he's said something wrong.

Leonard swallows thickly and shakes his head. "Not cool, Jim," he manages to grunt out. "That's private stuff."

He walks out before Jim can respond. He moves faster than his normal pace so Jim can't follow after him, and he manages to get to his quarters without running into anyone on the way there.

He's already yanking his shirt over his head before the doors have finished closing behind him. He abandons his clothes on the floor to deal with later, throws open his shower stall, sets the temperature to hot, and gets in while the water is still freezing cold.

He sucks in a sharp gasp of air at the chill, gripping tight to the walls of the stall. It's a needed shock to his system, and some of the panic ebbs.

He'd assumed that Jim knew he made a pass at Spock, but now? Now Spock knows he had a thing for Jim, too. Still does, but he hopes—God—he hopes he hasn't been that obvious.

Leonard groans, dropping his hands from the walls of the stall to bring them to his face. He muffles a distraught shout, then lets his arms fall at his sides. He turns and locates the soap and starts to scrub away the grim and salt that still clings to his skin.

The rest of his shower is spent mapping out how long he'll be able to avoid Jim before Jim chases him down. He can probably skirt Jim's attention for at least forty-eight hours. He'd rather beam off the ship and disappear on some colony somewhere for the next six months. Instead, he's gotta be an adult.

Shit.

For once, Jim keeps his distance, and for the first week, Leonard is nearly overcome with relief. Even Spock seems to get the message that he shouldn't pester Leonard and keeps out of his way.

Leonard throws himself into his work, and when he's done for the day, he goes back to his quarters and nurses a drink while he works to convince himself that he'll get over this soon and that he'll eventually stop caring for them both, because the alternative...

Well, the alternative is that he never stops feeling this way, and that idea overwhelms him so terribly that he has to shut his eyes and focus on his breathing for a while.

It's a week of this rhythm: he works until his eyes burn, then sprawls out on his bed with a drink in hand until he either finishes it or finds that he can't even stomach feeling sorry for himself anymore and leaves the glass next to the bed to dump out the following morning.

He finds himself thinking that this is the rhythm he'll have to keep up for the rest of his career on the *Enterprise* before the door chimes after an especially long shift. He sits up, his legs hanging off the side of his bed, and even as he calls out, "Enter!" he considers crawling into bed and locking his visitors out so he doesn't have to face them.

Spock and Jim enter. They're together, of course; they're never apart anymore.

They're silent. Leonard stares down at the floor at his feet; he's sure they're staring him down, waiting for him to speak, but it's already so awkward and uncomfortable that he doesn't want to make a sound. Eventually, he looks up, glum, and forces himself to meet Jim's eyes.

Jim's expression immediately starts to soften. He exhales, then wets his lips. "Okay. I'm going to do this now so things stop being so damn weird, alright? Think we can talk instead of whatever the hell we've been doing?"

Leonard looks past Jim at Spock. Spock nods just slightly and Leonard sighs, tucking his chin into his chest. "Yeah, let's talk."

Jim relaxes. "Okay. Good."

He hesitates, then steps forward, joining Leonard on the bed. Spock follows Jim but remains standing in front of them, his hands folded behind his back.

Jim's quiet. His brow furrows, as if deciding where to start. He raises a hand to rub at his neck, grimacing. "Look, Bones. Things have been weird for weeks. I wasn't going to say anything—"

"—that's new," Leonard says with a halfhearted snort.

"Well, I wasn't. But then Spock noticed it, too, and you *know* something's wrong when even Spock thinks things feel off. It's been..." Jim stops, searching for the right word. "Awkward. Uncomfortable.

Wrong."

He glances at Leonard before letting his eyes settle on Spock. Something passes between them. "But things have been weird," Jim continues, "since Spock and I got together." A beat. "Probably because of that. Am I right?"

Leonard can't look at Jim. He can't look at Spock. He stares down at the floor, swallowing thickly. "Yeah, you're right."

He hears Jim inhale, but before he can let Jim speak, Leonard quickly adds, "Look, I'm supportive. I really am. I—I don't want you thinking I'm some sort of bigot. You know I'm not, right?"

"We know, Bones."

"Seriously, I'm happy for y'all. I really am."

"We know, Bones," Jim says again, sounding a twinge more exasperated. There's another pause, and then Jim scoffs. "Dammit, Bones, can you look at me?"

Leonard lifts his gaze.

"Spock told me you asked him out," Jim says.

Leonard huffs, his face burning as he glances at Spock. "Of course he did. I suspected he would."

Spock's face doesn't crack, revealing no inclination of what he's thinking. When Leonard looks at Jim again, he finds that Jim is studying him.

"I knew you were upset—" Jim starts, abruptly stopping. He frowns. "Well, I thought... I thought that was all that was going on. I mean, before... I just thought you didn't want to third-wheel, but then Spock told me that you asked him out, and um..."

He trails off, looking unsure what to say next. Finally, he says, "Well, that made sense. And I thought that was all it was."

Leonard's face is still burning. He knows what's coming next, but Jim has gone all quiet again, and Leonard can barely stand it, gripping the sheets underneath his hands.

Jim watches him carefully. "But that wasn't all it was, right?"

Leonard nods.

"...You never got over that crush on me, did you?"

His stomach churns as he nods and looks away.

“Leonard.”

Spock sounds closer; Leonard lifts his head and realizes that Spock has knelt down in front of him, and upon catching Leonard’s eye, Spock gives Leonard a steady, warm look. Something deep in Leonard twists in yearning.

“Jim and I have discussed possible arrangements,” Spock says, and before Leonard can try to decipher what *that* means, Spock continues, “and we’ve determined that it would be best to hear your preference.”

“My preference.”

Spock glances over at Jim, then looks back at Leonard. “We would like to ask you to join our relationship.”

Leonard stares.

He opens his mouth, then shuts it. “You want me... to join.”

“Correct.”

Leonard continues to stare. He processes what Spock is asking him—or tells himself to process it, his brain isn’t actually doing its job—but all he can do is stare.

“You could think of me in that way?” Leonard asks, turning his head to look at Jim in disbelief. “Romantically?”

“Well, yeah,” Jim says, looking all flustered. “I’ll be honest, Bones, I felt something back at the Academy. I just thought you’d moved on, so I did my best to move on, too.”

Leonard turns his head, raising his brows at Spock. “You’re cool with this?”

Spock nods.

Leonard scoffs. “Seriously? *You?*”

“In Vulcan culture,” Spock begins, “multi-partner relationships are quite common. It makes child rearing and household maintenance simpler. It is—”

“Yeah, yeah, it’s logical. Christ.”

Leonard sighs and runs his hands over his face. Is he really considering a relationship with them? There are so many ways this could be screwed up—that he could screw this up—and *he* doesn’t want to make a mess of things. Nothing could be worse than a starship whose captain,

first officer, and chief medical officer were all stuck in an intense couple’s spat and giving each other the cold shoulder.

But he wants them, and they want *him*. This is what he’s wanted for weeks now. And if it’s what they want, too...

He drops his hands from his face. “I don’t want to intrude.”

Jim snorts. Spock says, sternly but not unkindly, “We would not have asked if we did not want you.”

Still in disbelief, Leonard says, “Well, okay.”

Jim grins, covering Leonard’s hand with his own and giving it a squeeze. A foreign sort of giddiness strikes Leonard, and he has to stop himself from chastising himself; for once, the feeling is warranted.

Leonard laughs; he can hear his nerves in his laughter. “Seems like the sorta thing we need to shake on. Feels less like the start of a relationship and more like we’re striking a business deal.”

“That makes this sound so formal,” Jim says with a snort. But then he smiles, squeezing Leonard’s hand again. He leans in close, and for a moment, Leonard thinks that Jim is going to kiss him, and he freezes, his heart starting to race.

But Jim doesn’t move, just keeps smiling at Leonard, his eyes taking Leonard in. Finally, he says, “I think we owe you dinner to make up for all that lost time.”

“I’d like that,” Leonard says. He’s unexpectedly choked up, and he stands, looking away from Jim.

He approaches Spock, feeling more shy than he’s used to. “There’s something I’ve been wanting to do since I asked you out,” Leonard says, and Spock has barely had time to raise his brow before Leonard kisses him.

Spock’s lips are smooth against Leonard’s and he shifts his mouth, kissing Spock deeper. It’s only when he hears Jim huff that Leonard pulls away.

Jim’s lips are pursed together in a pout, his arms crossed in front of his chest. “Where’s *my* kiss?”

Leonard smiles. He crosses the room again and gently presses a chaste kiss to Jim’s cheek. In Jim’s ear, he says, “*You*’ve gotta buy me dinner first.”

Leonard spins around, heading towards the doors. They open and he's half out when he turns his head, calling, "Y'all coming? I'm starving."

Spock and Jim exchange a look; then, Jim leaps past Leonard out the door. "You're about to have the shortest dinner of your life," he calls out, already flying down the corridor.

Leonard looks back at Spock. "Is he usually like this with you?"

Spock appears to be barely holding back his exasperation. "... Unfortunately."

Leonard sighs softly. "We probably shouldn't keep him waiting."

Leonard starts to walk down the hall after Jim, but he's stilled by Spock's hand on his arm. Leonard looks back at Spock.

Spock's brow furrows, looking aside as he gathers his thoughts. "I had been worried about you, Leonard... I wanted to see you happy." Spock pauses, his eyes meeting Leonard's. "Are you happy?"

Leonard steps closer and kisses Spock again, slowly, lovingly. "Very happy, Spock. Incredibly."

He draws back. "Now, don't tell Jim you got another kiss. He's just going to insist I owe him more."

"You have my word, Leonard."

With that, they head after Jim for dinner, the back of their fingers brushing softly together as they walk.





Forget-me-nots

Maria - niezjadajmnie

They say that right before you die, your whole life flashes before your eyes—a highlight of the most important moments you’ve lived, the ones you swore you’d never forget. That’s how Spock knew he was dying.

He saw his first encounter with Jim when cadet Kirk was getting scolded for cheating at the Kobayashi Maru. Back then, he was a young, smart, and slightly arrogant man, explaining his actions to Spock from across the hall. There was no shame in his voice, not even a hint; he was proud of the trick he pulled off. Even from such a distance, his bright eyes caught the Vulcan’s attention. They resembled the sky—two tiny, bottomless universes.

The memory floated in Spock’s mind for a moment, then disappeared.

Another vision appears. A picnic they shared during a shore leave on Earth during a warm summer evening, the soft light of the setting sun. Jim and Spock shared their first kiss that evening, gentle and shy. Spock almost smiled, recalling the glistening blue eyes looking at him with pure adoration.

That was a good memory. Spock tried to hold on to it, but it vanished faster than the previous one. As it faded, the Vulcan found it harder and harder to remember. Earth, a picnic... And someone sitting on a plaid blanket. But who was it? Spock knew it a moment ago, but now he wasn’t so sure.

The third vision only appeared for a split second. A desert and red mountains in the background. Spock, dressed in an elegant white robe. People were around, cheering and clapping their hands. Spock saw flowers in his hands, a bouquet of Forget-Me-Nots. Their color reminded him of something, but he couldn’t say what exactly. It seemed important, though, probably as important as the person standing before him. Spock felt like he should know them, but their silhouette was blurry. It could be anyone. Spock tried to remember something, but his mind worked slow... too slow. Thick darkness overtook the vision. The

Vulcan felt like he was falling asleep, but he knew it was much more serious than that.

Then, a sharp pain filled his body. It seemed to emit from his torso, his right side precisely. Soon after, another painful wave came, and another one. Spock wanted it to stop, he wanted whatever was doing this to leave him alone. But he had to find out who the person from his vision was. They were important, Spock could sense it. And what did the Forget-Me-Nots resemble? Nomen omen, the Vulcan could swear he was forgetting something that should never be forgotten.

The pain was his chance to remember, to live. So he gave in, let it roam around his body and mind. The darkness weakened a bit. The unpleasant sensation intensified, but Spock didn't fight it, even though he could. The pain seemed to give him strength. His thoughts started to run faster as the darkness stepped aside.

Spock opened his eyes. He didn't die after all. He looked around, only to discover he was lying on a bed.

"My God, he made it!" some man yelled with relief. Spock glanced at the stranger and the blue uniform he was wearing. A doctor? It's the Enterprise! The sickbay, to be precise. But who are those people?

"Spock? Spock!" another man, a smiling blond, came running towards him. Another unknown face. His uniform was yellow. "Baby, you're awake!"

The man pulled Spock into a tight embrace. The Vulcan tensed up at the touch, and the man felt it. He pulled away, a little concerned.

"Spock, is everything okay? How are you feeling?"

The Vulcan raised his brow. "Keeping in mind that I have almost died, I feel quite alright," he said, sitting up on the bed. A wave of pain went all the way up his spine but faded away seconds later. Spock chose to ignore it. "Please identify yourself. I'm aware of the fact that we're currently in the sickbay on the Starship Enterprise, but I don't know you personally. Are you perhaps the captain of this ship?"

He saw a hint of fear in the man's eyes. "Spock?" the stranger asked, and Spock could hear the disbelief in his voice. "What... What are you talking about? What do you mean you don't know us?"

"Shall I repeat myself?" Spock suggested calmly. "I do not recall meeting either of you before."

The man looked at him, then turned to the doctor. He was worried.

"Bones? Is it true?"

The man in the blue uniform nodded with resignation. "His heart went still for almost two minutes. Knowing that it normally beats 242 times per minute, those two minutes could lead to serious damage in the hippocampal cells. It's strange that he remembers the Enterprise, but he might not recognize us at all."

"Is it... You know, long lasting?"

The doctor shrugged. "It's hard to say. If the brain cells aren't permanently damaged, some memories might come back. But if they are... I really don't know."

"No... No, come on!" the blond sat in front of Spock and grabbed his hand. At first, the Vulcan wanted to move away, but he instinctively laced their fingers together, not really knowing why.

"Don't you remember?" the man asked. Spock saw tears filling his eyes. He looked down at their joined hands and noticed something he overlooked before. The man was wearing a golden ring. The same ring was also present on the Vulcan's finger.

"I... I don't understand." Spock took his ring off and took a closer look at it. There was an engraving on its inner side.

Beloved, 3372.7

The Vulcan read out loud. The stranger smiled, a tear ran down his face. He took off his ring as well and showed Spock the inscription.

T'hy'la, 3372.7

"See?" the man sniffled quietly. "We're married, Spock. Don't you remember?"

Spock looked him in the eyes and froze completely still.

Those eyes.

Those gorgeous blue eyes.

That's what the Forget-Me-Nots reminded him of! He recalled the last vision, struggling to put the pieces of the puzzle together. The red land. Planet Vulcan. The robe, the bouquet... A wedding! And the

person sitting before him, his husband, most beloved...

"Jim," Spock whispered. He placed his hand on the man's cheek and saw his eyes lighten up. "Your name... is Jim."

Kirk nodded and laughed through the tears. He pulled the Vulcan into a hug, wrapping his arms tightly around him. Spock run his hand through his hair and moved closer, getting rid of any space left between them. How could have ever forgotten?

"Don't you ever scare me like that again." Jim mumbled, taking Spock's hand. He brought it to his lips and kissed it.

"I shall do no such thing, T'hy'la" Spock promised, putting his ring back on. He rested his forehead on Jim's and took his hand, connecting their index and middle fingers. He couldn't imagine not remembering this simple feeling.

"I shall never forget."

Kirk smiled and connected their lips with a passionate yet gentle kiss. "I love you, Spock."

The Vulcan opened his mouth to answer, but the doctor interrupted them.

"Yeah, that's very romantic and stuff, but this is the sickbay!" he said categorically. He put his hand on the captain's arm. "Let him rest, Jim. He'll still be here in a few hours, perhaps even better by then if he gets some sleep."

Jim wanted to argue, but he went silent seeing the doctor's stern gaze. He gave Spock a quick kiss and stood up. "I'll be back shortly, alright?" he said, heading for the door. "Don't forget me, baby!"

Spock glanced at his wedding ring, then back at Jim. He was tired. Before closing his eyes, he allowed himself to smile.

"I won't, *Ashayam*."





Kiss Her You Fool

cptnkaseykirk // captainkaseykirk

“I think they broke up” Jim says as he strolls into Scotty’s office at the back of the engine room. Scotty doesn’t have to ask Jim to whom he is referring, but he does anyway.

“Who?” He asks. His voice is neutral, feigning innocence.

Scotty can tell Jim doesn’t buy his sad attempt at nonchalance. The pitch in his voice is likely a dead giveaway.

“Spock and Nyota. Spock cited “irreconcilable differences” or some shit but I’m pretty sure it’s because she’s pissed about those self-sacrificing stunts he likes to pull. Can’t say I blame her.” Jim says, furrowing his brow. Scotty watches as a hint of concern flashes across the captain’s face before it settles into irritation.

Scotty looks back down at his work list, ignoring the way his heart dances a two step in his chest. “I don’t understand why yer’ telling me cap’n. It’s none of my business.”

“Like hell it isn’t!” Jim fires back in amusement. “It’s your business to know when the woman you’re in love with is available again.”

Scotty flushes hotly, the heat creeping up his skin like a flame. “I’m over that already,” he says, astutely avoiding meeting Jim’s eyes.

Jim snorts. “Tell that to drunk Scotty. You know you’re a sap when you’re drunk, right?” The heat climbs further, and Scotty knows the blush gives him away.

“How do you know?” He gives in after a moment of silence, finally meeting Jim’s piercing gaze. “...That it’s really over this time?”

“I know Spock.” Jim says matter of factly, like it’s the easiest thing in the world to admit when you’re in love with someone. “And he’s been in my quarters every night since the Yorktown incident. Just trust me on this one— *I know*.”

Scotty sighs. “It dinnae matter anyway. It’s not like I’ve got’a chance. Besides, I’m taken by the most beautiful silver lady in the entire galaxy. She might be high maintenance, but she’s all mine.”

Jim shoots the engineer a droll look at his statement— “she’s

actually my lady, Mr. Scott, and it does matter because Nyota is totally into you and has been since you stood her up on that date back at the academy. Don't ask me how I know— women talk and it's the captain's job to know everything." From this, Scotty deduces that Spock told him during one of their evening "debriefing meetings" that were thinly veiled gossip sessions.

"I dinnae *stand 'er up*." Scotty objects hotly, accent growing thick. "It's not my fault the tribunal shipped me off to that bloody ice planet the day of our date. I hadta' wait nearly two years to apologize only to find out she had a *boyfriend* who had been her *professor* the last time I saw her!"

Jim chuckles and claps Scotty on the back. "My point is, Casanova, she liked you enough at one point to agree to a date with you. She's single again with no other romantic prospects for the next three years. You've got more of a chance than you realize. Now, I'm letting you off duty early. Get up off your ass and go ask her out on a date so you'll finally stop giving her those pitifully longing looks— it's hurting crew morale."

Scotty runs a hand down his face. "Where would I even take her? I think the *Enterprise* is a beaut, but she's not one for "romantic get-aways."

Jim grins. "Observation deck three is hardly ever in use, and I heard we're passing a particularly bright nebula tonight. Now seriously get out of here and go find your girl— that's an order!"

Scotty breaks out in a tentative smile, nervous hope pooling into his stomach. He claps Jim on the shoulder as he brushes past him and heads for the door.

"Oh, and make sure you kiss her, you fool!" Jim calls as the doors slide shut behind Scotty's retreating figure.

He blushes at the thought.

It's late— not that "late" exists in the vast expanse of space where time has no meaning— but late enough that the junior officers from third shift are finally retiring to their quarters.

Scotty should've gone to bed hours ago. In fact, his next shift

starts in under an hour, but he finds himself seated firmly on a bench facing one of the Enterprise's large windows, arm brushing against the woman beside him.

The observation deck is enveloped in a purple hue. Outside the window, hints of periwinkle, blue, and pink dazzle across the great expanse of darkness. The nebula is young and vibrant, and while a life in space permits the viewing of thousands of nebula, this one is particularly breathtaking.

Or perhaps it is not the nebula, but the woman sitting beside him that is making his heart race so fast he can scarcely breathe.

Nyota lounges beside him in a comfortable silence, contentedly humming a tune he and Spock had performed earlier that evening during their recreational hours. He listens to her and reflects on the warmth in his chest.

Scotty has wanted Nyota since the moment he saw her all those years ago at the academy before he was shipped off on probation. He'd been smitten the first time she'd turned her smile onto him and convinced he would never see her again after he'd been "relocated" to Delta Vega. But fate, it seemed, had other plans and he couldn't have altered his destiny if he'd tried.

Nyota stares out the window, and Scotty watches as the colors of the galaxy dance across her face, bathing her in an ethereal glow. She turns to look at him, tired eyes catching him staring and she smiles.

She starts to giggle, deliriously sleep-deprived, then giggles turns to laughter that takes on a hint of hysteria. In the midst of her cackling, Scotty leans over and kisses her soundly.

And then—suddenly—she's not laughing anymore.

It's an awkward, open mouth kiss and she tastes like replicator coffee, mint, and a hint of something he can't place yet.

"Did you just kiss me?" She asks wide eyed and breathless when he pulls away.

"No" he responds solemnly before leaning over and kissing her again.

She kisses back this time, laughter on her tongue and mirth in her eyes.



Cornflowers and Peach Blossoms

Tumblr: [uss-genderprise](#), AO3: [USS-Genderprise](#)

Jim Kirk had a predisposition for Hanahaki disease.

It was genetic, of course; his mother had had it, and after the death of her husband she had fallen ill and eventually decided to go through the surgery.

Jim often wondered if she had known, before, that the risk of never being able to love again would include never being able to love her own children.

He wondered that less now.

He never coughed up flowers for her. He coughed them up for Sam; first, tiny daisies, and later, chamomiles. Perfectly white petals. They never grew into full blooms, never fell out drenched in blood, and eventually, they stopped coming at all.

He was already in space by the time they started showing up again.

He had almost believed that he could go his entire life without ever falling in love, but of course, Jim Kirk could never get that lucky.

It started with tiny pink petals, light and soft, fluttering as they fell from his lips. Then they grew, each petal two to three centimeters long, coming in pairs or triads, then with pollen stamens, white with dark pink tips. By the time the full blossoms fell from his mouth, lightly dotted with blood, he knew who the object of his affection was, and knew he would die with the taste of peaches on his tongue.

Except—except, then the blue started.

Tiny petals once more, bright, light blue and dark, night purple, uniform in shape and size. He didn't recognize them until the full blooms finally came—cornflowers.

Peach blossoms and cornflowers. Pink and blue.

They made for a beautiful swimming bouquet before he flushed them down the toilet.

He knew the others could tell that he wasn't doing well. He didn't cough too much while on duty, but his voice was still rough no matter how much tea he drank to soothe it. The circles under his eyes

didn't let up no matter how much sleep he tried to get, because he always woke up to cough from dreams he couldn't remember. He was losing weight as the flowers in his lungs sucked the nutrients from him.

Jim should have been dead by now. Everything he had read on the subject said so. If not cured or treated, the disease had an 86.3% fatality rate in the span of six months.

But his love was slow, calm, clean. The petals came full and uncrumpled, rarely marred with blood, and Jim allowed the coughing to overtake him in waves, like floating on an ocean. He was in no rush to die. He was in no rush to heal.

He went about his life as though it was nothing, as though he wasn't actively dying. Bones would say he was killing himself, and Jim earned a small coughing fit for that thought. It didn't matter either way. He had what he always wanted, his ship, his friends, his found family. He could die in peace, if that were necessary.

There was no way it wouldn't be.

One time, late at night, Spock caught him hunched over the toilet seat. Jim managed to flush before he could see, said he was just a bit sick, and hoped Spock couldn't smell peaches on his breath, wouldn't know the difference in the sounds he made. Spock asked him to go to sickbay but Jim just smiled wearily and lied that he already had, that he just needed to sleep it off.

Spock only raised an eyebrow when Jim showed up on the bridge the next morning as though nothing had happened, and if he heard Jim hacking in the bathroom since, he didn't bother him.

When the flowers started coming up with branches and leaves, Jim knew the end was near.

He already found himself out of breath more often. It had almost gotten him killed on a few missions, and the only thing that kept him on his feet and dodging phaser fire was the thought that if he got hit, he would have to go to Sickbay. So he swallowed the cough and kept on running.

He couldn't run forever, though.

He was in a state of delirium, or at least, he had to be. He wouldn't have done it otherwise. Wouldn't have dragged his feet,

leaning against the walls for support, gasping for breath with every step. Wouldn't have entered the room knowing how late it was and, despite that, knowing he would be there.

Wouldn't have begged for help.

There must have been a part of his mind that still thought he could be saved, salvaged, or he wouldn't have done that. But he knew, deep in his heart and growing in his lungs, that he couldn't. Wouldn't. Didn't even want to.

That he even woke up at all was a miracle. He tried to speak but Bones shut him up, pointed out the air tube stuck down his throat, and gave Jim a PADD to write on instead.

Jim didn't want the surgery. He wouldn't do to his friends what his mother did to him. No matter how much they begged him. It was almost a constant cycle, coming and going and crying and begging, and Bones, there in the corner, a hovering shadow just waiting for him to acquiesce.

But Jim had made his mind up when he was ten and showed the first symptoms. He didn't want the surgery.

And Bones cried.

Because Jim had told him, before. Years before. It wasn't like this back then, before all the flowers, but Jim loved lightly, easily, and there was no shame, no awkwardness, and they were both happy. Jim never asked for this. And there was nothing Bones could do.

Untreated and uncured, 86.3% of all Hanahaki patients die.

Come the next morning, Jim would be nothing more than a statistic.

The autopsy was almost easy. Jim's skin gave way under the scalpel and his ribs didn't resist as Bones pushed his sternum open. His lungs were almost brown with the mass of roots, and when Bones opened those up too the flowers almost jumped at him, like a perfectly trimmed garden in red-pink soil.

They were fresh, their scent permeating the air. He had barely realized the fondness he had grown for cornflowers. The peach blossoms reminded him of home, his mother, his cousins.

The cornflowers reminded him of Jim.

He wept.

Almost a hundred years later, in the garden in front of Leonard McCoy's house, when the ambulance pulled up and the medics announced him dead, a dozen cornflowers slowly wilted.



A Brief History of Family and Domestic Life on Starships

AO3: spocko, Tumblr: alright-spocko

Jim is a good boyfriend.

He doesn't steal the blankets, he doesn't leave his socks on the floor, and he always asks about Spock's science experiments (even if he's not sure why they need to know if penicillin grows on Rigel).

And he's a lot of things—impulsive, charming, ruleskirting—but he's not the type to go through Spock's things. They've been together for a year and a half, and Jim's not the jealous type. Did he get a *little* irritated when that one Romulan captain tried to flirt with Spock? Sure, but he *gets* it—he's distracted by how hot Spock is all the time—and he can't really say anything when he's flirting his way out of danger every other week. Spock certainly puts up with *that* enough.

But it's all an accident, really, because Spock is off on the bridge for Beta shift while Lieutenant Mara recovers from Levodian flu, and Jim needs the duty rosters Spock hasn't sent over yet.

(Scotty wants extra hands on Alpha for the next week while they do something probably slightly against regulation to the warp core, but science is asking for extra help to decontaminate a lab for some experiment, and *hell*, it's frustrating when he and Spock aren't on the same shift.)

It's not like Jim even has to override the lock. They're in and out of each other's quarters, depending on who's off duty first. When Jim can't find something, half the time it ends up being neatly placed somewhere over here. Last week, he found his copy of *A Tale of Two Cities* on one of Spock's bookshelves. But he doubts he's going to find the duty rosters tucked next to a copy of *The Teachings of Surak and Early Human Space Colonization*.

Jim likes seeing their stuff mixed together between their quarters. It's a feeling of domesticity he's never had, a space he's welcome to beyond his own. It's no longer just *his* or *mine*, but *ours*, too, like the new chess set they picked out together on Capella III.

The more their quarters become entangled, the more he realizes he never wants anything else.

He wanders over to Spock's desk. There are neat stacks of PADDs, probably organized very logically to a Vulcan, but certainly not to Jim. The stack he picks up contains *Daystrom's Report on Multitronic Computer Systems*, Gamma shift shore leave requests, the VSA's semi-weekly science bulletin, and... *A Brief History of Family and Domestic Life on Starships*.

Jim picks it up before he even registers what he's doing. He scrolls through it quickly, skimming through pages about families on board Federation ships. There's an introduction discussing Boomers and pre-Federation cargo ships before it delves into kids on science vessels. There's even a section about Admiral Archer bringing his dog on the first exploratory mission (about four generations before the one Scotty accidentally beamed to God-knows-where).

It doesn't hit him immediately. He's absentmindedly reading through examples of independent study curriculum for young Vulcan children when it dawns on him.

Does Spock want to adopt a kid?

They've talked about how Spock nearly resigned his commission to go to New Vulcan. There were plenty of reasons he didn't, and Jim knows he wasn't really one of them. But he'd always inferred that going back and starting a tiny Vulcan family was more out of logic and obligation and *my species is on the verge of extinction* rather than some paternal instinct.

In the years he's known Spock, even before they got together, Jim has never heard him mention wanting kids. And Jim has to concede that he's never mentioned it either, but it's never come up.

And shouldn't it have?

Their relationship has *never* been casual. He's in this for the long haul, and he knows Spock is too. At the end of the day, all he wants is Spock safe and next to him, wherever that may be. But he's not sure how a kid can fit into that, really, with the danger they're always in.

Hell, a quarter of their crew is ensigns who are fresh out of the Academy and barely adults, and Jim can barely keep them safe from Romulans or Klingons or whatever new alien culture they've pissed off that day.

Jim puts the PADD back in the stack and stops his search. For once in his life, he understands when Spock says he needs to meditate.

He forgets about the whole adopting a kid thing for a bit because captaining a starship is chaotic. This week, they ran into a hostile cloud-like entity and almost botched a first contact situation because an ensign picked up a rock that wasn't, well, a rock but rather a sentient mineral life-form.

Jim doesn't know how this ever blurred together. Every day, it's something new and thrilling and life-threatening.

So when he and Spock finally have a chance to sit in the mess one night without a crisis brewing, Jim doesn't think to bring up the weird PADD he found. Instead, he finds them a table along the back wall where they'll be left alone. He gorges himself on a steak dinner while Spock eats the replicator's version of pok tar.

(Spock has deemed it "acceptable" in comparison to most of the other Vulcan dishes programmed in. In an uncharacteristic display of emotion, Spock once called the plomeek soup "revolting.")

It's nice to be able to just kick back and relax on a slow evening. No panicked running, no urgent comms from engineering or tactical, everyone is just milling about as if nights like these are a dime a dozen. The science labs are working on a study that won't yield results for at least two weeks. Their next stop is star mapping out in the Pelias system. *No one* should bother them.

He and Spock are deep in conversation. It's grounding, just the two of them. It doesn't matter what they talk about, really, because Spock's smooth, low voice washes over him in waves. They could be talking about the weather, ship business, or arguing, and it's more calming than any meditation techniques Spock has tried to teach him.

"I just think we'd be better off if Starfleet had less admirals, y'know? Seems like everyone's an admiral these days, and they all seem to have a stick up their ass." There may not be a crisis, but Jim got a routine, undeserved wrist-slapping a little under an hour ago about their most recent requisition requests. It's not *his* fault they tend to get shot at more than other ships.

"Did you not apply—"

"*Don't*, Spock. Don't remind me that I almost chained myself to a desk," Jim grumbles as he moves his broccoli around his plate. It's one of the few vegetables he's not allergic to, and Bones has made it so the replicator always adds at least a serving of green to his plate at every meal. To be honest, he's sick of it. "I'm just saying, we could all do with a few less Komacks in the world, couldn't we? Or at least promote someone like Paris who doesn't *suck*. I like her."

"Komack does seem to, as Doctor McCoy might say, have a... stick up his ass," Spock says without a hint of irony as he cuts into his pok tar.

Jim bursts out laughing, and he can't decide whether he's laughing at Spock using an idiom or the fact that Bones is missing this moment.

"I can't believe," he says, trying to catch his breath, "my first officer would encourage such discussion of the admiralty."

"As your romantic partner, I believe my response was well within acceptable behavior." Spock raises an eyebrow and smirks.

"Well, *thank you*," Jim says, his laughter fading into a grin. The moment buoys him enough that he gamely takes a bite of broccoli and manages to swallow it without complaint.

Their conversation turns elsewhere, bouncing between what's happening down in stellar cartography and a discussion about whether or not the new holo technology will be put on the next refit of the Enterprise.

"I doubt the new holo rooms would benefit the crew, Captain. It is valuable space—"

"*Spock*, imagine the *training* we could do up here—"

They're interrupted when Uhura stops by, her long ponytail swishing behind her as she takes her tray back to the replicator. "Any luck picking out names yet?"

Before Jim can ask what she means, Spock levels a glare at her so cutting that Jim's surprised she doesn't flinch.

"What?" Jim watches Spock stiffen, and he feels like he's missing something. Spock and Uhura are still close friends, but there

is something that Spock clearly doesn't want him to know and that's *weird*.

"I had a tribble named Arlo once," she says wistfully, but she gives Spock a look that Jim can't quite read. She flips her ponytail and wanders away towards Sulu and Chekov, who are having an animated discussion about a holo soap opera.

"Are you going to explain what the hell that was all about?" Jim asks.

"I believe we were discussing something called a 'holodeck,'" Spock says sharply, changing the subject, but the tips of his ears flush green.

Jim wants to press it, but he won't here. If Spock is going to tell him, it's going to be when they're alone and not within earshot of a half-interested audience. So Jim launches into a description of a rock climbing holo program he got to try last time they were in San Francisco and tries to forget about it.

Jim doesn't think about it again until they've spent two days evading and fighting off rogue Andorians who want to start a war that no one really understands.

He's in bed, wide awake, curled around a soundly-sleeping Spock. It doesn't matter that he hasn't slept in two days, the adrenaline is still coursing through him, and he can't seem to turn off his brain. He's hoping that eventually, Spock's even breathing will lull him to sleep.

They nearly die a lot—and he's already died once. He's seen Bones bring Spock and half their crew back from injuries that should have killed them, and they've lost a lot too. When they don't, the crew knows it's just luck. If there is anything he's learned in the last few years, it's that they live in a perpetual state of a red alert, whether it's official or not.

How many starships have already been lost to unknown dangers? Uncharted space is the Wild West, and the Enterprise has barely scraped through its share of showdowns.

Jim *knows* the rules are changing, that people want to go into

space with their families. He also knows plenty of the crew won't risk it. Sulu has flat out refused, choosing the loneliness of an extended mission over worrying about his family's safety.

"Jim?" Spock murmurs, shifting next to him. He doesn't open his eyes, but he tucks an arm around Jim's waist and pulls him closer. "You are restless." His voice is low and sleepy, and it slips around Jim like a blanket.

"Go back to sleep," Jim says, curling deeper into Spock's hold.

"Something is bothering you, *ashayam*," Spock says into Jim's hair, and Jim shakes his head. They're finally alone and together, and if the day hadn't been what it was, maybe they could talk about it now. But Jim can't bring himself to do it, even if it's killing him to know why Spock hasn't brought it up.

What does he think is going to happen?

"Nothing that can't wait until tomorrow," he whispers, kissing him softly before turning over and tucking himself back against Spock.

He feels Spock drift back off (and damn if he isn't jealous that Vulcans can just *will* themselves to sleep), and he wonders if they'll ever talk about it. Does he think Jim won't hear him out? It can't possibly be logical to avoid the conversation, no matter what Spock thinks the outcome will be.

Eventually, he gives up trying to rationalize it and lets himself drift off to sleep.

"I think Spock wants a family," Jim says to Bones, hiding in the lounge. It's deep into a skeleton crew Delta shift, and most of the ship is sleeping. He stares at Bones from the seated side of the bar, knowing they've been here in this exact situation far too many times—Jim spiraling and Bones psychologizing.

Bones pauses mid-pour, pondering the bottle of bourbon in his hand, before setting it down. He crouches down behind the counter, and Jim knows he must be digging into the secret compartment they had Scotty install in the floor. When he emerges from below the counter, he pulls out a bottle of Romulan ale that is somehow *mostly* full, despite *Scotty* knowing about the spot, and fishes out a new glass. He fills

both of their glasses a bit higher than he normally would, even though they're both on Alpha the next day. He pushes the shot of bourbon and a glass of blue alcohol towards Jim.

"You sure?" Bones says, taking a sip. Jim picks up his and stares at it.

"I mean, it all adds up. The weird PADD I found with that article on domestic life, Uhura's odd comment in the mess..." Jim looks up at Bones. "I just don't think I want to be a father."

Bones doesn't say anything for a moment, just tucks the Romulan ale back in its hiding place. Jim feels his face burning, as if the admission that he doesn't want a kid is somehow embarrassing. He never thought he'd be a shit dad, even though he never had one, but it's never appealed to him. Sam and Aurelan have Peter on Deneva, and that's just fine, but his own kid? He spent so much time alone as a kid that the idea of his own is just... weird.

"Well, you and Spock aren't exactly the products of excellent fatherhood, considering, well... yours is dead, and his is a Vulcan."

Jim narrows his eyes and slings back the bourbon. "What a roundabout way of saying you think we both have daddy issues. Which we do *not*."

Bones chokes on his drink, but goes on like he hasn't heard him. "But he did want to go back to New Vulcan, settle down a bit. Maybe that was less about repopulating New Vulcan and more about himself than you thought."

Jim shakes his head and takes a swig of the Romulan ale. It burns pleasantly, and he wonders how the three of them didn't finish this three days after they left spacedock. "We've talked about it before," he says slowly, "and I don't think so. If settling down and having a family was the real reason, I don't think Uhura would have been so upset about it, other than the rush of it all. It seems to me she felt like he was settling for a life he didn't want."

"And maybe that's why you're upset about this really, Jim. It's not that Spock might want kids, and you don't. It's that he's thinking about it and hasn't even mentioned it."

"It's been *three weeks*, Bones. Who knows when he got a hold

of that article. He's talked to *Uhura* about it, but not me."

"Talk to him, Jim. Surely there's a reason he hasn't said anything. It's not you, it's *him*."

Jim fights the urge to roll his eyes and downs the rest of his drink. "Sure, Bones. I'll get right on that."

They're heading back to officers' quarters, and Jim is tired purely due the lack of *anything* interesting happening. Instead of someone trying to take them hostage or steal their dilithium, they completed some star mapping with zero incident.

The doors hiss open, and both Jim and Spock exit the turbolift. "Next time I complain about running into some alien conman, remind me of today," Jim says as they make their way down the hallway, nodding to those they pass.

"Certainly," Spock replies.

They make their way into Jim's quarters, finally alone. He immediately crowds into Spock's space, wrapping himself around Spock and breathing deep. He knows Spock just pulled a new uniform from the replicator this morning, but it already smells distinctly like him. When he looks up and meets Spock's gaze, he doesn't seem tired at all.

Instead, Spock seems distracted, jittery—and Jim's not even sure if Vulcans *can* get jittery.

"You good?" he murmurs, a hand reaching up to touch his face. "You seem a bit on edge."

Spock stares at him and shakes his head. Jim untangles himself from around Spock, but Spock reaches for his hand and threads their fingers together. "Jim, I wish to discuss something with you."

Jim's response catches in his throat. He didn't take Bones's advice—they haven't talked. Something always comes up, and he knows he can't avoid it now that they're off-duty and alone.

"I don't want kids," Jim blurts out before he loses his nerve. He lets go of Spock, stepping back so they're a few feet apart.

Spock stares at him blankly for a moment before replying, "You do not?"

"I know you've looked into it, that there's precedent for us to

bring a kid onto the ship, but I've never really wanted to be a parent, and it's even worse because even if I changed my mind, I don't think I can do it when I know there's a chance either of us could die." Jim's talking fast, words tumbling out before he can stop them. Spock opens his mouth to interrupt, but Jim keeps going. "I can't make a kid go through what I have—a dead parent, a grieving one—"

"Jim—" Spock tries again, stepping towards him.

Jim shakes his head, stepping back and raking a hand through his hair. "And I know I should have said something sooner, but I don't know why it didn't *come up* sooner. Why *haven't* we talked about this? This is it for me, Spock—you and me, in space. It's *all* I want. I *love* you."

"And I you—"

"Then why didn't you—"

"*Jim*," Spock says sharply, moving so they are mere inches apart.

"Sorry."

"It is I who should apologize. I have clearly upset you." Spock's eyebrows are furrowed in concern, and Jim feels his posture shift stiffly. "Why do you think I have been looking into fatherhood?" His expression is searching, and Spock grips Jim's hand again, as if Jim is slowly slipping away into another dimension where he's lost his sanity.

"Don't you want to adopt a kid? I saw the PADD, I swear I wasn't... *snooping* or whatever, I just..." Jim feels himself deflate a bit, but Spock doesn't look away.

"*A Brief History of Family and Domestic Life on Starships*," Spock says slowly. His expression softens.

"I was looking for the duty rosters," Jim explains. "But it was all about kids on ships! About the Boomers and the science vessels—"

"And Admiral Archer's canine companion," Spock says.

"...Yes," Jim says, because he's unsure why Spock's bringing up a dog who once almost got murdered by a bunch of aliens for peeing on a sacred tree.

Spock sighs. "Jim, I have no interest in being a father."

A wave of relief washes through Jim. "But you were going to

resign—"

"Yet I did not. And while there were many factors in my decision to stay in Starfleet, the fact that I was not truly interested in fatherhood was a major one." When Jim doesn't say anything, he continues, "I, too, fail to see the logic in bringing a child aboard a starship. And while I am sure we would make adequate fathers if the situation called for it, I do not intend to choose a path where I would fear the shadow of my father's own failings."

"So you *don't* want to adopt a tiny Vulcan orphan." Jim backs up until his knees hit the edge of the bed, and he sits down with a sigh of relief. After weeks of confusion, avoidance, and fear, it's not hard to feel *joy* in being wrong.

Spock sits down next to him. "I do not. And I apologize for making you think I was avoiding the subject." Spock smiles softly, the way he only ever does with Jim. "But your conclusion was not far off, *ashayam*. I was simply making sure there would be few obstacles barring us from my proposition."

Jim blinks at him, but says nothing. His assumptions have gotten them nowhere, and he's too tired to think any harder about it.

Spock continues, "I was thinking, we may opt to adopt a feline companion." His eyes light up like they do when they encounter a new space anomaly. "There is no reason we could not bring one on the ship — there are many documented examples of felines on starships, although most are stowaways, and Admiral Archer —"

Jim doesn't let him finish. Instead, he turns to kiss him, hard, still holding Spock's face in his hands when he pulls back.

"Yeah," Jim breathes, grinning. "Let's get a cat."

Spock is a good boyfriend.

He trusts Jim's instincts, he's never mad when Jim needs a night out with Bones, and he always lets Jim bitch about Starfleet bureaucracy. He's also apparently a cat person, which Jim didn't know but is delighted to find out.

He'd always had barn cats in Riverside, but Jim thinks it'll be nice to have one that's just theirs. He's already imagined a cat following

him around the ship, finding a warm spot in engineering while he and Scotty work, meowing when the doors to his quarters hiss open after a long shift.

“This one seems suitable,” Spock says, holding a black cat against his chest. He’s scratching him lightly behind the ears, and Jim can hear the cat purring as he nuzzles into Spock’s chest. The cat hasn’t so much as glanced at Jim, and he’s trying not to feel a bit offended.

Jim’s fantasy is already morphing into something else. Instead, it’s Jim dropping by the lab to find Spock and the cat dutifully analyzing some experiment.

The cat shelter, not too far from Starfleet headquarters, has plenty of cats to choose from. It’s a large, open building where cats are wandering aimlessly. But when they walked into the room, Spock immediately zeroed in on a small black cat perched on a cat tree. His green eyes looked up curiously at Spock, and Jim thinks they had a moment.

“...Suitable?” Jim laughs, amused. “Isn’t that a bit... sterile for the cat you haven’t let me hold for fifteen minutes?” Spock hasn’t said it, but Jim’s pretty sure they’ve already found *the one*.

“He seems to have a good temperament, and he is not startled by our interaction.” Spock looks down at the cat, his eyes softening and a slight smile creeping across his face.

(It makes Jim swoon, just a little bit.)

Jim reaches out and strokes the top of the cat’s head. He leans into Jim’s touch, and Jim can feel him still purring. The cat looks at Jim, and he thinks they have a moment too.

“I think he likes you, Jim.”

“I think he likes you a bit more, Spock, but that’s okay. Let’s take him home.”

Spock nods in agreement and looks around for someone to fill out the paperwork. When they find a shelter volunteer, Spock hands Jim the cat as he takes a clipboard to begin filling out various forms. The cat blinks up at Jim and begins to purr again.

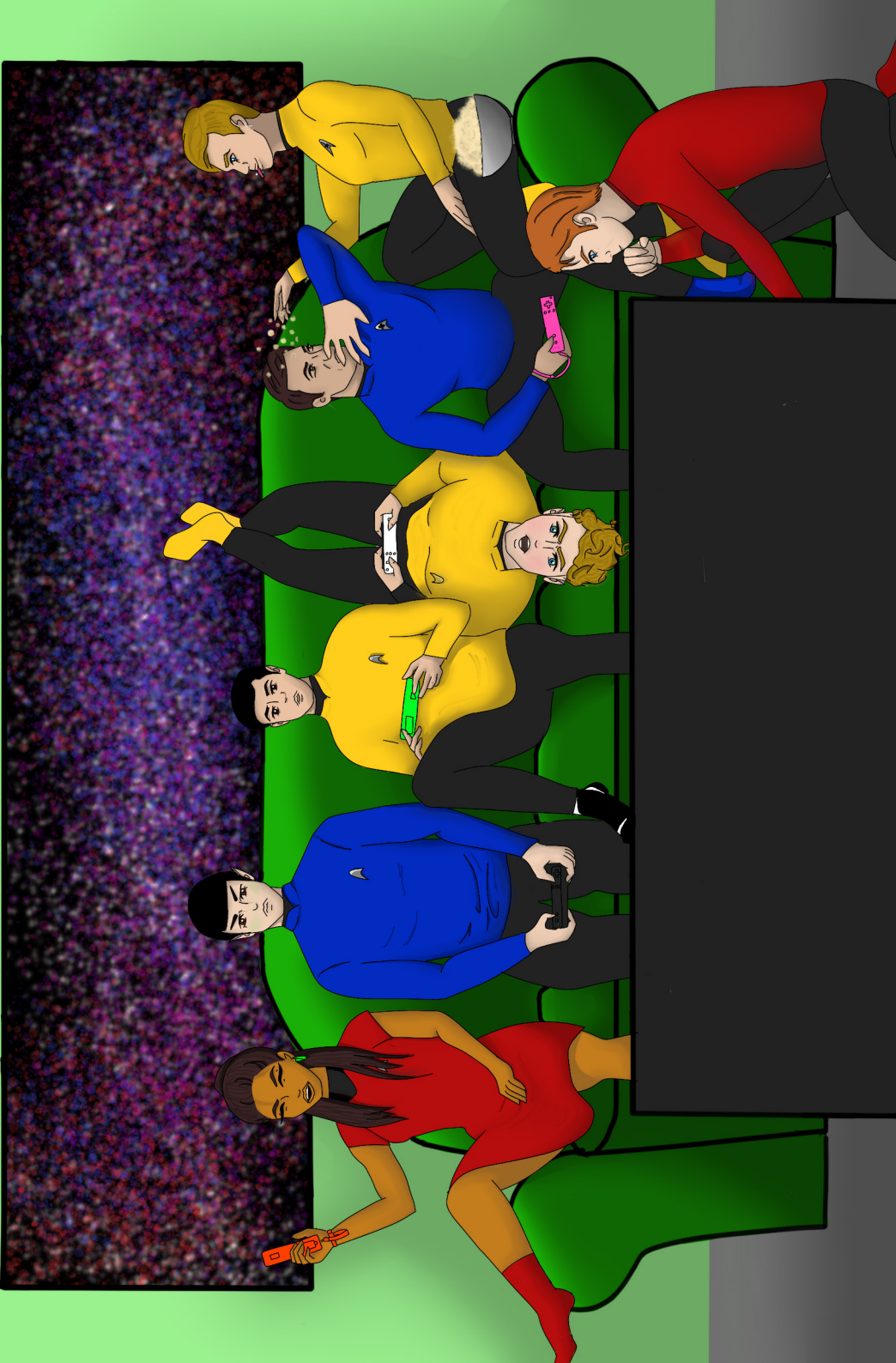
Spock hands off the paperwork to the volunteer, and she wanders off to get a carrier.

“So what’s his name? Jim asks, handing the cat back to Spock.

Everything else is taken care of—litter box, food, treats. Surely Spock already has something picked out.

Spock pauses for a moment, opening his mouth to respond, then closing it.

“I had not considered.”



Beuch

Binary Stars

AO3: asoulofstars

The *oh* moment. The realization. Love has a tendency to smack you in the face before you even realize it. And when you *do* realize it, then it is now officially a problem. Especially when you have your *oh* moment about your best friend. Someone who will probably never love you back. Someone who your whole world revolves around. Everything is better with them; things make more sense with them. They're the reason that you get out of bed in the morning.

Sometimes, it's one big life-shattering, world-changing moment. Sometimes, it's a little hint of a moment, and then you have your own big moment later.

Leonard McCoy's *oh* moment was definitely the former. Star-date 2258. It was time to go into space. It was time to go into space, and he had to walk away from his best friend to do it.

"Jim, the board will rule in your favor. Most likely." Len tried to be reassuring, but he also really couldn't guarantee that outcome.

He was nervous for Jim, and he didn't want to see his best friend lose out on his dreams because of this. It was heart-wrenching to think that Jim could be kicked out for something like this. Sure, no one passes the Kobayashi Maru, but Jim took an unwinnable situation and made it so that he was able to succeed.

"Yeah," Jim said softly, as if he knew what Len was doing, refusing to look him in the eyes.

He hated that Jim couldn't even look at him, couldn't even turn around. "Look, Jim, I gotta go." It was apologetic; Len would stay with Jim forever if he could.

"Yeah. You go. Be safe." Jim forced a smile when he did turn around and shook his hand, squeezing tight.

Len turned around and started walking towards his shuttle. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. He froze in his tracks, chest tight, and he swallowed hard. His heart stuttered, and he realized *exactly* what this feeling was.

He closed his eyes for a second, and his mouth twisted into a grimace. "Damn it."

He was in love with James Tiberius Kirk. And he couldn't just go off into space, on the *Enterprise* of all starships, without the man who convinced him to qualify for a starship posting in the first place. He needed to have Jim by his side. There was no question there. His heart was fifteen steps behind him, losing all its light. And he couldn't stand for that.

He whirled around, pace quickening as he bee-lined straight back to Jim. He grabbed Jim's arm, unsurprised that Jim had turned around.

"Come with me," he ordered in Jim's ear.

"Bones, where are we going?" Jim asked.

"You'll see," Len growled.

Len moved them through the crowd, tightening his grasp on Jim as they walked past Uhura. He kept Jim moving, dragging him into a small medical supply area.

"What are you doing?" Jim asked with a slight whine.

Len searched for the supplies he needed. "I'm doing you a favor. I couldn't just leave you there looking all pathetic." He pushed Jim into a chair. "Take a seat. I'm going to give you a vaccine against viral infection from Melvaran mud fleas." He jabbed a hypo into Jim's neck.

"Ow! What for?"

"To give you the symptoms," Len replied like it was obvious.

"What are you talking about?"

"You're going to start to lose vision in your left eye," Len warned.

"Yeah, I already have," Jim replied.

"Oh, and you're going to get a really bad headache and a flop sweat."

"You call this a favor?" Jim asked, breathing heavily.

"Yeah, you owe me one," Len answered, hooking his hand under Jim's arm.

Len knew this was *ridiculous*. He knew that he shouldn't be dragging Jim with him. He definitely shouldn't be *drugging* him.

But he also knew that Jim was much more perceptive than he'd ever let on, and he did not need Jim coherent enough to question his decisions. He did not need Jim questioning his heart. They had an active Starfleet emergency on hand, and he needed to shove all his emotions into a little box and forget that he even had this realization and that he was dragging his emotional support idiot out with him when it could get him court-martialed or worse just because he couldn't stomach the thought of going to space without Jim Kirk. His realization was that he was absolutely entirely fucked.

Jim Kirk's realization was definitely the latter. A softer hint of what was to come, and then a much larger realization that tore him up inside, because he really couldn't do anything about it. His softer one was Stardate 2258 in a Starfleet Academy hangar.

Jim was grateful that Bones didn't leave his side after all the names were called, even though he knew that Bones would have to leave. He looked crestfallen, and he felt himself deflating.

"He didn't call my name," he said to Bones, as if Bones hadn't been standing right there, hadn't heard the man skip over *Kirk--USS* whatever ship he was going to be assigned to.

There was a slight pang in his chest as he considered Bones going to the Enterprise, the *flagship*, and he would be left here. He moved after the man who read off the names.

"Commander! Sir! You didn't call my name!" He prayed that it was a mistake. "Kirk, James T."

"Kirk, you're on academic suspension. That means you're grounded until the academy board rules." The commander walked away.

His eyes followed the commander's path, feeling like everything he'd spent the last three years working towards had just crumbled into dust. He felt more than heard Bones edging closer.

"Jim, the board will rule in your favor."

Bones *tried* to be reassuring, and Jim couldn't look him in the eyes, but that was to shield himself. He could hear the doubt in his friend's tone, and he didn't want Bones to see how much this hurt. The

uncertainty in Bones' voice made him almost turn, waiting for that impact.

"Most likely," Bones added, never one to pull a punch.

Jim still couldn't look at him, though, trying to breathe. He stared at the ground.

"Look, Jim, I gotta go."

He wished that he couldn't hear the regret tinging Bones' voice. He knew Bones didn't *want* to go and leave him stranded there. But orders were orders, and Bones had to walk away. He took a breath to steel himself against the ache in his chest, and he turned, plastering a fake smile on his face as he offered Bones his hand.

"Yeah, yeah. You go. Be safe." He hoped Bones knew he was being sincere.

Bones gave him a small nod, and he turned. Jim watched. One, two, three, four, five steps.... It hurt too much to keep watching, so he turned around, counting in his head, though, with Bones' pace. *Six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight...*

His count never stopped even as he apologized to the man moving through the hangar, trying to move around him. It was only interrupted when Bones was grabbing his arm, leaning in to speak in Jim's ear.

"Come with me," Bones ordered.

Jim wasn't sure *what* was happening, but he knew that Bones was holding onto him, and he knew that Bones wasn't leaving him. His heart pounded in his chest, a second life starting.

His real actual *realization* was six months later, Stardate 2259.

Jim was an exposed nerve. Everything about this mission was setting him off. He didn't want to have Bones and Dr. Marcus beam down to the planet and open up a torpedo, but he also couldn't have them risk not knowing and destroying themselves. And when that torpedo armed itself, when he realized that Bones had *thirty seconds*, he also realized that *if Bones died, he'd lose every bit of himself*.

He was frozen with fear; his heart was slamming against his ribs, breaking them from the inside out.

“Dr. McCoy, are you alright?” he asked as the danger was over, forcing himself to breathe again.

Bones didn’t respond, and Jim’s heart missed a beat in its return to a normal pace.

“Bones!”

Please be alright. Please just say something.

“Jim, you’re gonna want to see this,” Bones said seriously.

And Jim melted hearing Bones’ voice, hearing Bones say his name again, and he realized that he didn’t think of Bones as *just* a best friend. Bones was *everything*. And he knew that he had to shove that realization away so that he could focus on the mission. But how could he do that when his whole world was tangled up in Bones?

How do binary stars come together? How do these two people, so wrapped up in their own thoughts and insecurities, actually do something with these realizations? How do they move forward with this knowledge?

Well, the gravity pulls their orbits inward. They have to meet at some point. For Leonard McCoy and Jim Kirk, that point is in Stardate 2263. After Jim’s birthday party. Jim had convinced Bones to come back to his suite, and they were sitting on the couch. Jim let out a long sigh and looked over at his friend.

“I almost did something really fucking stupid,” he whispered.

“You mean almost getting yourself killed? Again?” Bones shot back.

“I almost left you,” Jim replied. “I was gonna take a position here in Yorktown.”

Bones went quiet, and Jim swallowed hard.

“I’m sorry, Bones. It was an impulse decision to apply, and then I was offered it. But then all of this happened, and....I can’t leave you.”

“What changed?” Bones asked, voice hoarse.

“I needed to get my head on straight, and this mission did a lot of that, but it was mostly you. And, you know, being in love with your

best friend and not saying anything about it for four years is really hard, and—”

“Try five,” Bones replied, as if not realizing the way that Jim stopped talking.

“What?” Jim spluttered.

“I love you, too, you idiot.” Bones leaned in.

Jim sank into the kiss, and he pressed into Bones as close as he could.

Binary stars, who orbited each other for far too long, finally coming together. They had no idea what the future would hold, but they would figure it out together.



Martinspirkhal '23



Shine A Little Brighter

AO3: KnightAniNaberrie, twitter: @trekkingwonders

The Enterprise has a crew complement of 1172 consisting primarily of Andorians, Orions, and many, many young, enthusiastic humans.

For a half-Vulcan, freshly shed of his planet and his mother... it is incredibly, indescribably lonely.

Not that said half-Vulcan would ever admit to that, of course. Vulcans did not feel loneliness and did not seek out socialization and interpersonal interaction in the same way that many species did. Spock had Nyota, he had his work. What more could he possibly need?

The first month and a half passes under this assumption. Spock does his duties, studies, and works in the lab when he's free. On the increasingly rare occasion that Nyota is also available, they have dinner, make music, and primarily discuss work or Nyota's social life. Contrary to ship's rumors, they are not officially 'a thing' as he has heard it put before, but they maintain the illusion for mutual benefit. Currently, neither desires the distraction of potential suitors, and both appreciate that they have a space they are free to be a little less immaculate, a little more relaxed.

Unfortunately, their availability doesn't always line up. In fact, it seems to less and less as Nyota forms stronger relationships with other members of the crew, and Spock finds himself holed up more frequently in the science labs. When they do manage to meet up, Nyota is practically glowing, overflowing with tales of language work she's doing with an ensign, a choir some of the officers are forming, and an increasing amount of off duty encounters with Chief Engineer Montgomery Scott.

Spock is satisfied with his experiments and his duties as first officer. They keep him busy at all hours, and there's always more that can be done.

At least, this is what he tells himself those first few weeks.

In the time leading up to the official launch of Captain Kirk's Enterprise, Spock spends much of it alone. It's not so much that he

avoids people (not anymore than usual at least) but that at some point, they start avoiding him. When he'd first returned to the Academy, he'd been almost swarmed with well meaning colleagues, students, officers, and strangers, all with a near constant stream of condolences for his mother and his planet. Some offered only their words, others left somewhat inexplicable gifts such as lasagnas, bubble bath, a little heart-shaped dish with a jagged break down the center.

When Spock had reacted as he always did — polite, professional, unperturbed — the gestures of sympathy slowed to a stop, as did the casual hallway greetings, the invites to this or that social event, the eye contact during any conversation that drifted too near to Vulcan's destruction.

Maybe they thought he needed space to grieve, to process, but maybe they did, too. Even those who could look past the loss of a planet likely knew a classmate, relative, or friend who was lost on one of the ships. Grief touched them all, tempered the typically lively and bright interactions, casting Starfleet into a much more reserved, quiet state.

Spock spends his new found silence thinking over his options. He makes a decision, then a different one, then a different one. He tries to find the most logical path forward, tries to settle into his default meditative state and repeatedly fails.

Eventually, he decides to follow his elder's advice, to remain with the Enterprise. He tells no one, but it seems many already know. Whether they made their own assumptions or Ambassador Spock has been spreading unfounded rumors is unknown.

Shortly before they were scheduled to depart, Sarek gives Spock an envelope, a letter. His father seems almost reluctant to hand it over, and when Spock catches sight of his name on the front in his mother's handwriting, he thinks he can understand why.

"Your Mother left this for you. I had hoped to not have to share it with you for many more years."

"What is—"

Sarek cuts him off, the words rushing out slightly faster than Spock knows they typically would, as if he knows no other way to get through what he has to say. "Humans have a tradition. They often

write letters to themselves, or letters to others for when they have died. Amanda wrote only one letter, when you were young.”

Spock wants to rip into the letter immediately. He also wants to lock it into his desk in his quarters, looking at its sealed form everyday while never breaking that seal, never fully allowing himself to acknowledge what this letter means. But he knows, in the way his heart aches nonstop, that it is something he can’t truly hide from.

He manages to keep this last, flimsy connection to his Mother in one piece for two days after the launch of the Enterprise, only because he works straight through them until Kirk orders him off duty for a day. He’s annoyed when he knows he should not be, and meditation fails him, making the annoyance grow.

When he grabs the letter, fingers shaking, breaking the seal with a caution he doesn’t feel, the annoyance snuffs itself out. If it could only leave emptiness in its wake, but no, something much too strong and painful swirls in its wake as he takes in his mother’s neat script.

Spock,

Hello, my love. If you’re reading this, then I’m gone, but I wanted to leave you with something. Illogical, I know, but you must forgive us humans for our eccentricities.

In an ideal life, you will not receive this letter for many, many more years. I will get to see you grow up, to grow into the man your father and I know you can be and beyond. But none of us are guaranteed that. So here is what I see in you.

I see a beautiful, bright boy. The best of myself and my beloved. I see a young man who can find the reasoning in his passions, can out logic even the most well-debated Vulcan to get his way. I see such kindness in you, Spock. A desire to understand all, to do your part to make this universe shine a little brighter each day.

I wish you all the best, my son. I wish you love, whether that is with T’Pring or another. I wish you happiness and pleasure, to the extent that your Vulcan instincts will allow you to seek such. I wish you companionship and fulfillment, success in your academic life, career, and everything else.

Lastly, I leave you with this advice. Allow yourself to feel, Spock. Even Sarek, if pressed, will admit to you that Vulcan’s do not deny themselves feelings, only control how they reveal those feelings, the extent to which they allow themselves to be influenced by them.

Find love. Take risks. Make friends, Spock. There are people out there who will love and appreciate you just as you are. When you find them, hold them close and never let go.

I love you, Spock. And I wish you the strength to love yourself, and to love those who wish to love you back.

*XOXO
Mother*

Spock takes his lunches alone.

Nyota is on shift, and most days he prefers to simply grab something from the nearest replicator and continue his work in the lab, on the bridge, in his quarters.

He’s not certain what it is that makes him come to the mess area. It definitely has nothing to do with the letter from his mother, not a thing. Crew are clustered around tables, sitting, standing, chatting with one another. Some drift between groups, and there is more laughter in the air than there was only a few weeks ago. Humans adjust quickly to new circumstances, overcome losses with a special resilience.

Only a single two person table remains unclaimed, and Spock takes a seat there.

He makes it maybe fifteen minutes, peacefully enjoying the murmur of the crowd, thinking this is a good enough start and that he

needn't directly interact with the crew to enjoy their camaraderie, before being interrupted.

The clatter of a tray slamming down across from him startles him out of his reverie. A sharp stab of annoyance pierces through him, but he pushes it down, face carefully blank as he meets the eyes of the intruder. Doctor McCoy stares down at him, and the growing annoyance becomes harder to ignore.

"Mind if I sit here?"

As he scans across the room, taking in the full tables, the lack of available seats, a number of responses run through his mind. Everything from *You have nowhere better to be?* to a simple *You may not.* to a startling *You WANT to?* flit through his mind and nearly dance across his tongue.

What he actually says is "If you must."

McCoy correctly interprets this as the warmest welcome he's going to get from his reluctant table mate and settles into the seat opposite Spock, already biting into his sandwich before he's even fully sat down.

Make friends, Spock. Polite conversation, right.

"Unusual that you are here."

McCoy eyes him, expression stuck somewhere between annoyance and amusement. "Is that a commentary on the seating arrangement, or my existence overall?"

Spock blinks, meeting McCoy's gaze head-on. "I merely did not expect to see you outside of medbay. You spend much of your time there."

"Yeah, well. Chapel kicked me out. Can you imagine? Kicked out of my own damn domain!"

"Surely you could have overridden her request."

He shakes his head. "Not wise on *several* fronts."

The conversation could naturally die there. Instead, Spock probes, "Oh?"

"Best to keep your head nurse happy, especially when I think she's scheming with M'Benga. Man's too sensible for his own good, and they're both too sneaky for anyone else's. And I can hardly ride on

Jim if--"

McCoy cuts off suddenly, face going hard. "Sorry, Commander. Forgot who I was talking to."

With that, he shoves his chair back, grabs his now mostly empty tray, and stalks off.

The next day, McCoy had already claimed the same small corner table. Spock takes a chance, sliding into the unoccupied seat. They eat in silence for a while, not tense or awkward, but it's clear that McCoy is holding something back.

Whatever it is, it does not get voiced that day. After twenty or so minutes, they part ways with an amicable nod.

It becomes a pattern over the next week. Spock or McCoy will claim an open table, scaring off other potential seatmates through blank stares, grumpy looks, and chilling auras. Sometimes they eat in silence, appreciating that the other doesn't require a conversation partner on top of a lunch companion. Sometimes they talk, a little stilted and halting at first, but quickly shifting into something more open and friendly.

Also, much, much more snarky.

"Perhaps, Doctor, if you had a more pleasant bedside manner..."

"What would you know about bedside manners, you green-blooded hobgoblin?" Leonard nearly shouts, pointing his spoon at Spock. "Obviously you Vulcans never went to manners school."

"Not only do Vulcans have a different idea of approachability than humans, we do not require a separate school to instill this quality in us," Spock replies coolly.

An ensign at a neighboring table shoots them a side-eye, scooting her chair a little bit closer to her friends as if she fears their bickering may become physical. She doesn't see the warmth in their gazes, somehow doesn't feel the tendrils of friendship being extended with each barb, accepted and returned with each sarcastic reply.

Eventually, the Captain comes up again, and Spock and McCoy discover that they do have something in common: a frustration over Kirk's

lack of self-preservation skills.

“He just throws himself at a problem like he’s goddamn invincible! It’s-”

“It would be beneficial were he to consider-”

“That he might break his damn smug face!” Leonard finishes for him, barely pausing to take a breath before continuing sharply, “And who has to patch that up, huh? Me, Spock! Me!”

“And it is I who must fill out the reports, Doctor.” Spock adds in, though this earns him a surprisingly heated glare in response.

“Oh reports, paperwork. Who cares! Annoying, yes, but..”

“..but the basis of your complaint is that of a friend concerned for the Captain’s wellbeing.”

“Exactly!” McCoy pauses, eyes Spock like he’s not sure he’s going to like what he’s going to say next. “You know, I wasn’t sure about you at first.”

Spock blinks, thrown by the seeming change in topic. “While it is true that the human crewmembers prefer to keep to-”

“No, Spock.” McCoy says, rubbing at his forehead like it’s causing him pain. “I wasn’t sure about you. Around Jim.”

There are only so many reasons that could be, though they number more than Spock can say he preferred there to be. He doubted McCoy would hold a grudge over the Kobayashi Maru hearing considering Kirk received a commendation when the trial concluded after Nero. Which leaves the most likely candidate to be related to their altercation after... after Spock briefly gained command. “This is because of what occurred on the bridge.”

“No, actually.” McCoy says slowly, and Spock blinks again. “You’re not the first person Jim has pissed off to the point of violence.”

“Then what-”

“Delta Vega.”

Oh. Spock nods once, accepting Leonard’s answer but seeking clarification. “You do not consider that to be part of the same incident.”

“It’s one thing to go at someone when they’re right in front of you and have insulted your dead mother. It’s another to strand another person on an ice planet full of large monsters.”

“That was never my intention, Doctor McCoy.” But even as he says it, he knows it’s not fully accurate. “While I was aware of a Starfleet base located within travel distance of the approximate landing area of the pod, I did not take the appropriate time to consider the.. hospitality of the journey.”

“In other words, grief and anger got in the way of that logical brain of yours.”

Spock stirs his replicated plomeek, not avoiding McCoy’s gaze, but not attempting to keep the sharpness out of his voice. “I was emotionally compromised.”

“I know. I know how several humans would react in a similar situation, and it ain’t pretty. Add in Vulcan intensity...” he sighs, swirling a spoon through his own soup. “Don’t do it again,” he says gruffly.

“I don’t intend to.”

“Well, good.” There’s another loaded pause, and this time McCoy lays down his spoon, something startlingly earnest in his eyes. He clears his throat once, twice, and asks “by the way, how are you doing with that?”

Spock doesn’t pretend not to know what he’s talking about, nor does he entirely deflect. “It’s not something I expected to experience. Not so soon.”

“Yeah, I know that feeling. My Dad-” he cuts off, staring intently at his lap. Spock does not know what happened to Leonard’s father, but he can surmise enough by their topic to find only one response appropriate.

“Tushah nash-veh k’du.”

The doctor’s head bobs up, looking at Spock with a small frown. “What’s that?”

“I grieve with thee.”

For a moment, they simply stare at one another. Then something in Leonard’s eyes softens. “I like that. Not all hollow and pitying.”

McCoy holds out his lemonade in a toast, and Spock doesn’t hesitate to clink his water glass against it.

The next week, the barbs fly fast and hard enough that the two tables closest to them evacuate, abandoning their lunches early, moving in tight groups swiftly towards the door or redistributing amongst the tables further away. They've gotten on the topic of invasive species migration on Frintria VII, voices raising in a way none of the observing parties can quite tell if is in vehement opposition or enthusiastic agreement.

It feels good to test his wit, stretch the limits of his sarcasm, push the buttons of someone equally eager to push his back. Spock has had his share of verbal disagreements over the years, ranging from structured debates in his studies to personal attacks primarily in his youth. There's a level of comfort and enjoyment in his squabbles with McCoy that he greatly appreciates. The discussions aren't scripted, but neither of them truly means any harm, either. Teasing comments are just that, and beneath them lies a growing understanding. The two of them are not necessarily alike, but perhaps they are not quite as different as Spock once believed.

Maybe, the whole making friends thing isn't as hard as he once believed, either. Not here, at least, among those who've chosen a life drifting through the stars.

Nearly another month passes before the unexpected happens. Spock and McCoy are in the middle of another increasingly heated discussion, the tables around them full as the crew has come to learn that, as long as they remain uninterrupted, their bark in this instance has no bite. There's a bit of a ruckus around the door, and then in walks Captain Kirk, tucked in his own conversation with Sulu and Chekov. His eyes scan the room as he walks, surveying his ship, his people, until they land on the pair in the corner. He slows to a halt, bringing the gazes of his companions to look their way as McCoy catches sight of what's distracted Spock. He groans, glaring at the man he considers close enough a friend to drag illegally onto an emergency mission.

Seeing the two of them together, Jim smiles bright as the sun, causing a warm satisfaction to swirl through Spock. He waves, then pinches his fingers together, mimes two hands kissing. McCoy flips him

the bird, Spock raises a brow, and the Captain laughs, the sound echoing across the busy mess.

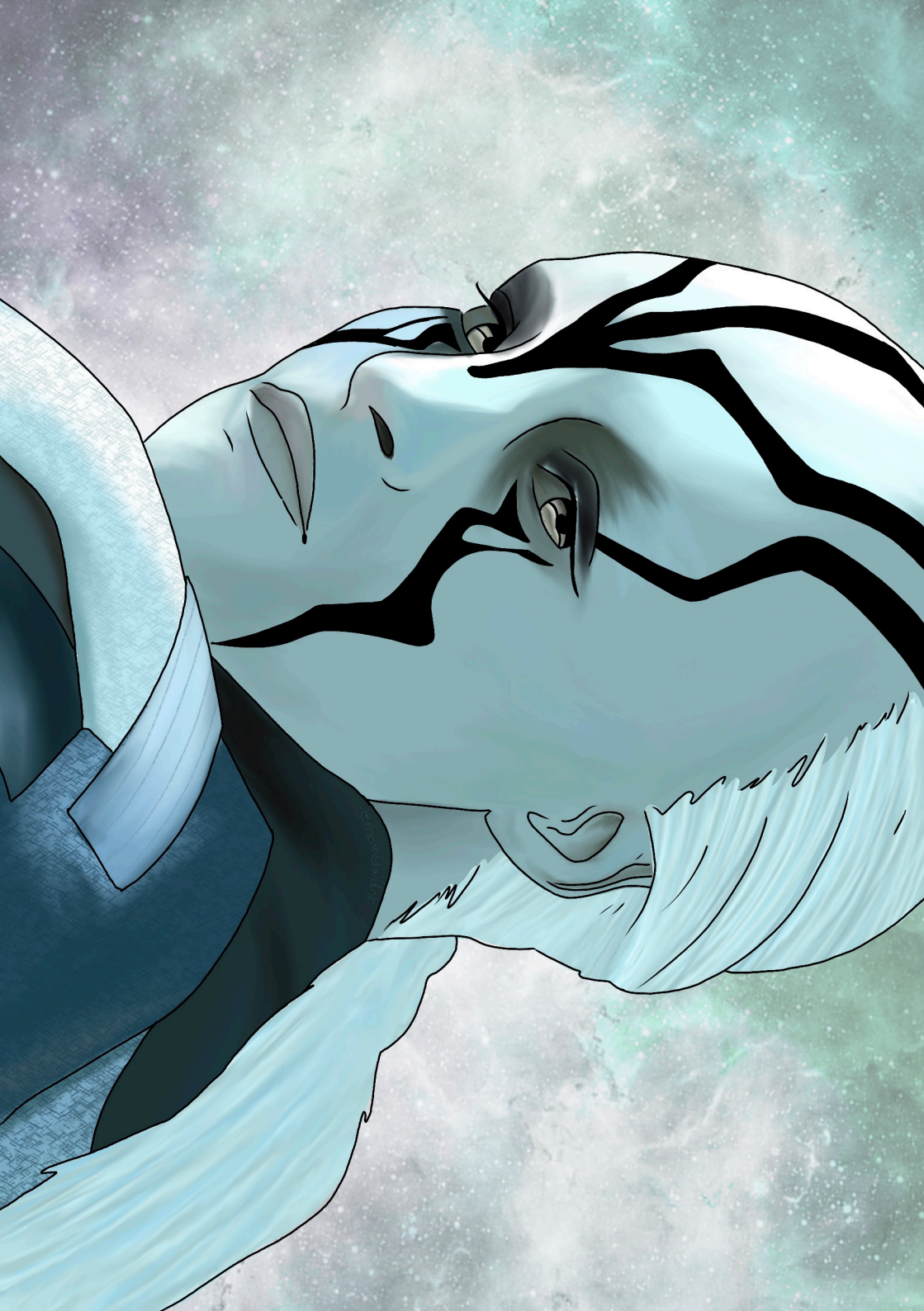
Spock has not forgotten any of McCoy's little slips, the moments where he's revealed a little more of Jim than he intends to. He's seen a bit more of that man recently, but not as much as his counterpart implied he would, not as much as he'd like to. It still feels as though they're on somewhat shaky ground with one another, still sizing each other up.

If Spock can make progress with McCoy, Kirk should be no challenge at all.

Sitting down, Spock writes the first of what will become a series of letters. This one is short, and he feels a little ridiculous writing it, but he does anyway. Inscribing the letters on paper, tucking the page into an envelope, addressing it to his older self - his *future* self - as his alternate elder has no reason to ever read it.

We may consider Doctor McCoy an ally and, more importantly, a friend.

Next objective: The Captain.



Unwritten Rules and Regulations Excerpt

AO3: asoulofstars

Ever since the destruction of Vulcan, Saavik's one goal had been to secure a position on the Enterprise. Finally, after the completion of the Enterprise-A, she had her chance. Altamid had been hard for the Enterprise and her crew. It was in desperate need of more hands, and Saavik was able to make that push. It had been almost seven years in the making, and it felt *good*. She finally felt like she had proven herself, proven to every person who sneered when they learned of her half-Romulan heritage, proven it to every person who said that she wasn't going to make it. She was now Lieutenant Saavik of the Starship Enterprise-A, and she would damn well do whatever it took to keep it that way.

What Saavik didn't know, however, was that despite the Enterprise's—and Captain Kirk's—reputation for rule-breaking, there were *a lot* of unspoken rules and regulations onboard the Enterprise. *A lot*. She was keeping a running list based on her experiences.

Enterprise-A Rule #1: Do NOT, under any circumstances, call Dr. McCoy "Bones".

That was one of those experiences that she, at least, was smart enough to avoid herself. She just witnessed the way that Dr. McCoy reacted to the new ensign. It was well-known throughout the ship and probably most of Starfleet that Captain Kirk did not call Dr. McCoy by "Dr. McCoy." To Captain Kirk, Dr. McCoy was "Bones." Saavik had always wondered what had brought about the nickname, but she was never going to ask. Human minds were full of strange and illogical connections anyways.

However, she and a few others had been on their first landing party that went awry. It seemed to be standard protocol for the Enterprise, as none of the senior staff on the mission seemed to panic. Dr. McCoy was yelling at Captain Kirk the whole time about how the Enterprise wouldn't be the Enterprise without some kind of mishap.

"*Maybe you can complain about it later, Bones?*" Captain Kirk had shot back amidst the phaser shots and Dr. McCoy's grumbling.

When they returned to the ship, a few of them had minor scrapes that needed to be healed. One of the ensigns that had been on the landing party was healed with the dermal regenerator. Saavik was sitting close by waiting for her turn, and she nearly flinched at the interaction.

“Thanks, Bones!” the ensign said wearily.

“*Don’t* call me that,” Dr. McCoy answered sharply, voice suddenly dropping the warmth out of his bedside manner. “Off you go, Ensign. You’re fit for duty.”

The ensign scurried away, and Dr. McCoy ran the dermal regenerator over Saavik next.

“Do you ever get used to it?” she asked Dr. McCoy.

“The chaos?” He raised an eyebrow at her. “Unfortunately, you do, Lieutenant. I just express myself however I damn well please.”

“As you should. Bottling things up would be illogical; that would just lead to a worse explosion of feelings at a more inconvenient time. You don’t relax until everyone else is taken care of, do you?”

He snorted. “If you ask Jim, I never relax.”

“Maybe you should try, Dr. McCoy.” The suggestion was gentle. “As our doctor, you should set an example in how to take care of ourselves.”

He rolled his eyes, though the warmth was back. “Well, maybe if people who weren’t Jim would stop calling me *Bones*, I could do that easier.”

“I think you made that perfectly clear. Word will spread amongst the new crew members, and I’ll assist.”

“Thanks, Lieutenant. You’re all set.”

Enterprise-A Rule #2: Do NOT ogle anyone in the gym.

Saavik decided “anyone” was the safest response after the possessive reactions of Captain Kirk and Lieutenant Commander Uhura the day that Commander Spock and Dr. McCoy sparred. They were just there to watch, as were about half of the off-duty personnel on the ship. It appeared that this was a sparring match that many people wanted to see. Dr. McCoy was shirtless, and Saavik could see stardates tattooed up his spine, a peach tree on his left rib cage, and the words “All I’ve got left are my bones” weaving through his right rib cage. Most eyes

were on him, but Commander Spock was also getting attention in his tight workout shirt that did nothing to hide his muscles.

The sparring match was much like their arguments. It was very back-and-forth, with both taking offensive and defensive positions at different times. Saavik could not determine who would win, which was a little bothersome. They enjoyed analyzing matches like this or chess to determine the winner, but it seemed as if they were toying with each other rather than actually trying to win.

In fact, one would have to call the sparring match a draw because Lieutenant Commander Uhura and Captain Kirk strode in, interrupting the match. Lieutenant Commander Uhura very gently touched Commander Spock with her thumb and forefinger around his wrist, and then she glared daggers at the crowd that was gathered. Captain Kirk was much more forthright, though.

“Alright, show’s over, Folks! Go get your rocks off with your own significant other!”

He then dragged Dr. McCoy out of the gym, and Saavik let out a little shudder as they realized where he was probably dragging Dr. McCoy off to. As they left to go to a computer and start doing some research, they heard Lieutenant Commander Uhura.

“Thank you, Captain. When will they learn?”

“Good question.”

Restoration

twitter: stanzasfic / tumblr: enterprize / ao3: stanzas

Eight or more years ago Jim probably would have started his log along the lines of something like this: *Stardate 2265.3, Tswos IV smells like the worst outhouse in the history of the universe.*

Well. Something like that. *That* Jim Kirk at 24 years young would have definitely included some unapproved Starfleet verbiage and expletives.

For a planet that smelled like the worst fart packed in with every combination of rotting fish, Tswos IV was actually fairly nice looking. As far as M-Class planets with a sulfur-oxide atmosphere went. McCoy had harassed Jim for an extra fifteen minutes about keeping track of his life support tank and not to touch anything without his hazard suit on. (Jim was pretty sure that McCoy was giving him longer lectures in relation to the number of Sickbay visits Jim earned on the last few trips.)

As far as Jim knew there weren't any eight foot alien spiders or mystical carnivorous snakes hiding under the dirt, which was a vast improvement from their last away mission. (McCoy hadn't stopped whining about that yet, either.)

Jim did a quick headcount over the crowd. There was at least one blue shirt missing, which was expected given the chaos and the number of people in need of medical attention, but there was a specific scowling blue shirt he was looking for.

At the evacuation center he found Uhura, kneeling beside a stack of Starfleet standard crates filled with arrays and the rest of their communication equipment. He tapped her on the shoulder; their touch-down camp was full of noise and he needed her attention. "Where's Bones?"

Uhura picked up her head. Even with her excellent hearing, speech was twice as hard to decipher with their filtration masks in the way. She tapped at her ear and switched off the commlink, which probably wasn't helping her any. Jim patiently repeated the question.

"He's in the children's ward," Uhura replied distractedly. "Chapel said the adults and older children were ready to evacuate." She lost

interest in him and frowned at her tricorder.

Jim stared at her. He poked her again, until she rolled her eyes under the visor and reluctantly gave him another second of her precious time. "Alone?" Jim demanded.

With a shrug she answered, "Spock's with him."

That was somehow worse. Spock was a huge pushover when it came to Uhura's wants and desires. He was about thirty times worse with McCoy. He usually gave McCoy a hard time about it for show, but Spock caved in about a quarter of the time it normally took Jim, so.

Uhura finally looked up from whatever was so fascinating on her readout. She caught Jim's expression and Jim watched the realization cross over her face. "I mean," she started. "He's not alone this time..."

"This is going to be Onlie II all over again," Jim said with a sigh.

Through the mask screen he watched Uhura bite her lip. "I'm sure he wouldn't," she tried, but she sighed with him and pushed herself off the ground.

"For the record, this time it's *your* fault."

Uhura hip checked him hard enough that he stumbled into the cargo container. "Careful, Kirk."

Jim hip checked her back. "You're so mean."

"Just to you. I know you like it." Uhura patted his cheek—or rather, clumsily patted around the mask and visor covering his entire face, grinning. Jim gestured for her to lead the way to the hospital.

The *Enterprise* had arrived two weeks after hearing the initial distress call from Tswos IV. There wasn't much left of the original buildings or infrastructure by the time the crew arrived to lend aid. From the amount of dust and craters, Spock had theorized the usage of primitive bombs—thankfully nothing nuclear—as the cause. The city was not so fortunate, leaving behind a mostly unsalvageable pile of rubble, but at least the lucky inhabitants they found were alive, and healthy for the most part. It was far better than the alternative, or treating radiation sickness after a two-week wait, by which point almost all of the Tswos IV population would have already passed on.

Despite the grim nature of their circumstances, the Tswosians seemed optimistic, as far as Jim could tell. Starfleet had ordered them to evacuate whoever they could find, but Jim had already overheard conversations from the civilians about their plans to return, one day, and rebuild.

That was about as good as Jim's luck was willing to go. He and Uhura climbed up the stairs to the third floor, where the makeshift children's ward was. Chapel spotted them and did some sort of evil wink that struck terror to Jim's core, while Uhura made a sound between a sigh and a soft laugh.

"They're in there," Chapel warned as they approached the makeshift desk Chapel was using out of storage bins. Jim didn't even have to ask. "I think they're doing storytime. All the parents we've found have come through already, so they're dealing with the stragglers now."

Good God. Jim said, with half-exasperated, half-fond dismay, "Not again..."

"Doctor McCoy's been bonding really well with them," Chapel continued. "He's really a *natural* with kids. It's adorable." She was really twisting the knife on him. Like *he* was the asshole for barging in before the real disaster struck.

"Very sad," Uhura agreed, and now she was making a little disappointed face at him too. Jim glowered at her, because they were supposed to come in here as a united front, and Uhura's defenses were already sliding out from under her. *Ugh.* Jim hated being the reasonable one. It always made him look like the bad guy.

"Yes, it is," Jim said, with the right amount of injected sympathy and gentleness, but he was not folding like a damn paper table either. "And I'm sure Starfleet will do their utmost to find their relatives or other family members to take them in."

"Hm," Chapel said. "Anyway. What brings you up here, Captain?"

"Just checking in."

"I'm sure you are," Chapel drawled. Jim made a face at her (which was their default method of communication). Chapel stuck her tongue out at him. Jim was mature enough not to do it back—at least

not until Uhura turned her back to peer through the door to the ward—and turned that evil eye on McCoy's head nurse.

Spock, that traitor, was in the children's circle holding a toddler on one hip while the other was asleep in his lap. McCoy had at least three hanging off him, and despite all that, was still making a grand effort to keep reading from the PADD in his hands.

He and Uhura didn't have to announce themselves. Spock's ear twitched and he turned his head to the door, saw the two of them, and Jim watched the infinitesimal emotional shift as Spock realized who had joined them, had a very small and quiet guilty panic about it, and then settled back into enjoying himself. The children were all somewhere between four and seven, if Jim had to guess, with the Tswosian red hair and yellow pigmentation around their hands and ears.

Two of them turned and took note of Jim and Uhura, but then turned back around to watch McCoy with a rapt and adoring attention that chipped away at Jim's ice cold resolve.

Jim twisted, looking for support, but Uhura's expression was pure joy. Damn it. He'd already lost her. Now he had two traitors in the midst of it all.

McCoy picked up on Spock's momentary distraction but he kept on reading, making those goofy voices and growls, much to the delight of the children if their giggles were anything to go by. After storytime he plucked the kids off him and either patted them off to bed, or scooped them up and dropped them on their mattresses while they giggled and made grabby hands for him.

One of the toddlers clung to McCoy's neck and refused to be convinced back to bed, so McCoy kept him there. "Captain," McCoy said formally as Jim approached him, but his mouth was twitching. Spock followed him solemnly in his shadow, though his eyes were on the child chewing at McCoy's tunic.

"Bones..." Jim started.

McCoy's expression shifted, and then he wasn't the *Enterprise* CMO or McCoy, and Jim knew he was talking to Leonard. "Hear me out. I know that—"

"No."

“Leonard has made exceptional progress in bonding with these children already,” Spock said quietly.

Jim shushed him. “As your Captain, I am ordering you to *stop adopting every child you run into.*”

“Jim.” Nyota’s voice was soft. She leaned into McCoy’s side and ran her fingers over the boy’s little nose, then his round cheeks. She gave him that look, like, *I know you’re being difficult on purpose, and you don’t have to fight us on this anymore.*

Weakly, Jim explained, “I’m trying to be the voice of reason. For once.”

Leonard gave him a flash of that sheepishly smug smile he got when he knew he’d won, and Jim was debating how hard it’d be to kiss it off him while he had a toddler hanging off him. It would probably get him a smack on the head.

Worth it. Probably.

“Unfortunately,” Spock said, his eyes twinkling in that way they did when he was laughing at Jim, “I fear that may be, as you say, ‘a lost cause’ in this instance.” He brushed his hands against Jim’s, and Jim felt Nyota on the other side. Leonard’s smile widened, which really should not be fair, because a person who scowled that much was not allowed to look that adorable. Nyota’s cheeks were pinched where she was biting. And Spock...well. He wasn’t smiling, but he was getting close to it.

Really, truly, tragically unfair. That was Jim Kirk’s life.

Jim sighed. He was a folding table afterall. “Oh, shut up, all of you.”

“I didn’t say a thing,” Nyota sing-songed.

“Next time,” Jim swore, “*I’m* going with Bones. As neither of you can be trusted.”

“We shall see,” Spock said sagely. Jim gave him an extra evil eye for being a smartass, and as Bones often bemoaned, Spock always found some way to have the last word.



delmariva
AUS: RAUENBERG 2014 0022

Jealousy Is A Green Blooded Alien @USS_QUEERTASTIC (Twitter), QUEERTASTIC (AO3)

Spock had always felt like an outsider.

Too human.

Too Vulcan.

Never enough.

At the edge- never fully being understood or understanding.

He had learned to control his emotions, but at times, he felt like he had to stifle the more human ones until they broke to the surface. Oftentimes they defied logic in unexpected ways.

Jealousy being one of them.

Jealousy was an emotion that ate and clawed at his insides while twisting like a knife to the gut. In the privacy of his quarters now and in his room growing up on Vulcan, jealousy would sting the corners of his eyes as a low rumble threatened to become a scream wanting to rip itself from his throat.

He found humans fascinating, he studied them, mostly in resigned contentment to watch and to admire, but the distance that would always separate him from them was a pain that worked its way deeper as time passed on the Enterprise.

Childhood rejection from the Vulcans turned to torment as, try as he might, Spock could never crack the code on what could bridge that gap, with Vulcans or humans, and no matter how many times he thought he was finally figuring it out, he felt as if at one turn he was being propelled in the opposite direction of that connection.

Focusing all his will on controlling his emotions after the death of his Mother and his home planet had confounded the humans he served with. They deemed him cold when he was trying to keep from burning from the inside out. It had started to sever those tenuous connections he had worked so hard over the years to form. He always knew they were fragile just like his human side, but he had let his logic slip and replaced it with the hope that maybe he was finding his place. To keep from falling apart, in their place he felt on the precipice of a facade cracking. He was at once more alien and more alienated.

As time went on, he established a new normal and Spock came to realize that deep-seated emotions often grow and bubble to the surface. What may start as an easily controlled irritation or annoyance, could become an incessant tug. Recently, that tug surfaced every time he saw one particular person, someone who was both accepted and accepting: Captain James Tiberius Kirk.

After having hastily excused himself from the bridge, Spock stood in his quarters with his fists tightly squeezed to focus his pain and emotions into the sting of nails into flesh, a habit he had developed when meditation could not refocus him. He had to admit that he had felt this way ever since the young captain had cheated on his test back at the academy.

Spock had assessed Kirk as reckless, self serving, illogical, and infuriating, but even then, there had been a wisp of that green circling his logic regarding the now captain and that once insignificant wisp had grown into a monster holding him in a chokehold, rivaling his strength and logic.

Many times his jealousy was channeled at the way that Kirk carried himself, his self assured nature, his effortless charm, the twinkle in his eye that matched the smug smirk he often wore. He was confident in a way that most humans never were at that age, when insecurity often won. Confident in a way Spock would never touch, having only his logic to rely on.

Maybe trying to be a little bit more like the captain had mixed together with his grief to create a gray emotional sludge and had been part of the reason he had done what he had inside that volcano.

But what had him rushing off in such a hurry today in a blaze of emotion that caused the heat in his cheeks to rise and his muscles to tense: simple human jokes, the way Kirk's eyes sparkled with laughter, and a back slap to Doctor McCoy.

An hour later, those emotions had started to integrate, going from a rolling boil to a gentle manageable simmer. Spock, having realized his impulsiveness was determined to apologize for letting his emotions control him, to control his decision to leave his duty, the bridge,

his captain.

He went back to the bridge to find the captain's chair occupied by Sulu. Captain Kirk should still be here. Their shift had not ended yet.

Sulu turned as if expecting his presence, (and did Spock detect sympathy in the other man's eyes?) "Captain's in his quarters."

Turning on his heel, Spock started to leave without saying a word, but then, for a moment, paused. "Thank you" he responded in almost a whisper. Would the bridge catch the dejection?

Spock had a decision to make: go back to his quarters and wait until tomorrow, or go to the captain in his quarters. Seemingly before logic could make that determination, he found himself standing outside the captain's door.

Logic told him that since he was already there, that he should chime, but the emotions that rose up told him otherwise. He stood there for what seemed like an eternity, his internal sense of timing thrown off as he wrestled with the next action to take when the captain's door slid open.

"You know I could practically hear you thinking out there. You want to tell me why you're here and what the hell was that earlier?" A steady voice called out to him, a siren call as Spock stood on the precipice.

Though he only suspected the nature of the relationship that Ambassador Spock had with the other Kirk, he knew they had been close. He knew they had often played chess in the other Kirk's quarters and probably had other reasons to be there. He had never been inside his captain's quarters. Was an apology a good enough reason to visit, or was it an excuse to be here? He didn't know, and that concerned him more than anything at that moment. It wasn't logical to fear the unknown because there was no data to be concerned over. But at that moment, Spock found himself afraid. Standing too close to the edge of the cliff to be logical but unwilling to back away even with the potential of falling, he was lured by a closeness that eluded him. A closeness he secretly craved to have with his captain.

"So, what will it be, Mr. Spock, in or out? I was always told not to leave the door open."

In or out? In or out?

A simple decision or a life-changing one. One that could shatter those threads of connection, fragile like his heart. Or, it could be a strengthening, a forging of their friendship. A way to calm the waters between them while the tornado of green raged in his mind. This was a space where he had never been. Uncertain, Spock did not possess the ability to boldly go in either direction.

Before he could make up his own mind, tanned fingers were wrapping around his arm with a tenderness and irritation that bore its way to the bone. "Come on. sit" he barely heard as he was guided into those quarters and made to sit on the couch. Kirk then leaned back on his desk, arms and legs crossing. Spock could feel himself being scanned. probed. analyzed.

"You'd like to tell me now?" it was more of a demand than a request, but it was still a question, one he was being given permission to answer or not.

Grounding himself in the touch of the fabric beneath him, registering the slightly cooler temperature of the room, and looking forward at some point on the wall, Spock sighed. It was not an answer but a response nonetheless.

Memories of him sitting in his father's study after getting in fights with the full-blooded Vulcans washed over him. He felt judged. He felt inadequate. He felt like that look could set him on fire, and would he welcome the flames to burn, to feel.

Kirk picked up on something, Spock didn't know what as his control and emotions were currently at war inside his mind, and it was still difficult to register that he was in the captain's quarters with the captain, his captain. But whatever he saw, Spock soon found himself with a hand on his knee as Kirk sat beside him. Too close, yet too far away.

"OK, you don't need to tell me. I will tell you, you are a valued member of this crew and I want you to be OK."

"Sorry" was all that escaped Spock's lips. Was it an admission of responsibility for his earlier actions, for not being the officer or the man that his father wanted or his captain deserved? Was it disbelief for

where he found himself? He didn't know.

Whatever that word carried, it traveled to Kirk as his hand was gently, tenderly, and perhaps absentmindedly massaging his knee. A feeling that was too much, yet not enough.


"Look at me," Jim said. And, for the first time since he had entered Jim's quarters, what seemed like only a moment ago yet also an eternity, that voice broke the spell, broke through, and broke him down. Spock looked into those eyes, "I know."

The next few minutes were a blur. He was overwhelmed, enveloped by warmth and a roughness that seared into flesh, branded him, and promised to scrub away the pain if only for a moment. He melted into those arms surrounding him, an invitation with each movement to let go and, with those lips on his own, to surrender. This was where he was meant to be, searching those pupils wanting him, calling him like the vastness of space, lost but anchored to the ship, to his captain. A burn that fused together time and space. This was where he belonged. This was his place.

The heat that filled him gave way to a scorching, all-consuming fire as the edges of sleep forced him back from falling completely. Suddenly that fire was replaced by the disappointment and darkness of his own room. A disappointment that left him empty, and that green-eyed monster hungry.



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